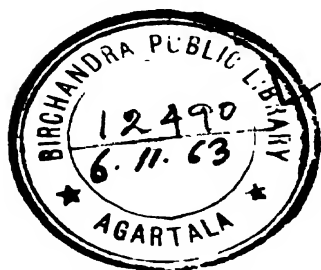


WILD ABOUT FOOTBALL

HARRY GREGG

His own story

WILD ABOUT FOOTBALL



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ILLUSTRATIONS

Between pages 44 and 45

My ball! And Harry Gregg jumps to it, making certain that Hamburg inside-forward Sturmer doesn't get the chance to notch a goal.

This was one that got away, but Manchester United lived to fight again another day. The F.A. Cup semi-final against Fulham – just after Munich – ended in a draw, and United went on to win the replay.

Who is the 'blind' man? Bobby Charlton, 'blotted out' by teammate Dennis Viollet. This is United on location – in Rotterdam, during a close-season tour.

No cheering thousands: just a five-a-side practice match at the Y.M.C.A. ground, with Harry Gregg (wearing a No. 10 shirt) making a save from hot-shot Bobby Charlton.

Phew! That was a near one. . . . Harry Gregg mentally doffs his cap to the Preston forward who sent in this scorching shot at Deepdale.

West Germany's golden boy, centre-forward Uwe Seeler, doing his best to score during the World Cup game against Northern Ireland.

It's Harry Gregg getting the ball in another action shot from the game against West Germany.

Salute to the Irish heroes who defeated England at Wembley. This, indeed, is sweet revenge for the day Harry Gregg let through nine goals against an English League team.

The King of Sweden shakes hands with Harry Gregg before the World Cup game against West Germany at Malmo.

The week after Munich . . . and this is the 'new' Manchester United. Before the crash, many of these players were in the youth team; suddenly, they became First Division players. Chief scout Joe Armstrong, second-team trainer Bill Ingles,

assistant-manager Jimmy Murphy, first-team trainer Jack Crompton (appointed that day), John Giles, Colin Webster, Tommy Spratt, Ernie Taylor, Shay Brennan, Alex Dawson, Jackie Mooney, Mark Pearson, Reg. Hunter, Freddie Goodwin, Bobby English, Reg. Holland, Ronnie Cope, Harold Bratt, Bobby Harrop, Barry Smith, Ian Greaves, Bill Foulkes, Peter Jones, Gordon Clayton, David Gaskell, Harry Gregg.

Desolation, utter and complete. Harry Gregg and Bill Foulkes, two of the few survivors, survey the scene of disaster on the Munich airstrip.

Pent-up emotions expressed by Manchester United fans as their team – the ‘new’ United – goes out to do battle with Sheffield Wednesday in the F.A. Cup-tie immediately after Munich. The roar of those thousands of supporters rose to a crescendo as the final whistle blew. For United had triumphed.

Success . . . and sad memories. The toast is victory – against Sheffield Wednesday, in the F.A. Cup-tie at Old Trafford immediately after Munich. Ronnie Cope, Harry Gregg, Bill Foulkes, trainer Jack Crompton, Ian Greaves, Freddie Goodwin, Shay Brennan.

Saved! Harry Gregg goes down to foil an England attack at Wembley. Covering him is Jackie Blanchflower . . . while Jackie’s club-mate (in the shape of England centre-forward Tommy Taylor) looks on.

Between pages 76 and 77

The start of the long way home from Munich. With Harry Gregg and Bill Foulkes is assistant-manager Jimmy Murphy. ‘Every time the train rocked, I was terrified,’ says Harry Gregg.

Hello and farewell. Harry Gregg’s last day at Doncaster before he goes to Old Trafford. And here he welcomes Ted Burgin, signed by Doncaster 24 hours earlier as his replacement.

Doncaster Rovers: Mooney, Tindill, McMorran, Cavanagh, Walker, Kilkenny, Hunt, Williams, Gregg, Gavin, Graham.

Tense moment during the World Cup game against West Germany – until the clutching hands of Harry Gregg grasp the ball. Watching and alert are Bertie Peacock and Fritz Walter.

Harry Gregg at home. And while he and his wife, Mavis, look on, daughters Linda and Karen try their hands at mowing the lawn.

Up and over! Harry Gregg punches clear as Dave Dunmore (Spurs) challenges for the ball. Hidden by the soaring Gregg – centre-half Ronnie Cope.

Between pages 108 and 109

Madrid, and the setting is the magnificent Bernabeau Stadium.

Watching, as Harry Gregg punches clear during an attack by Real Madrid, is the fabulous Di Stefano.

Was it a foul? Lofthouse crashes into Gregg during the Wembley Cup final between Bolton and Manchester United. This was the moment of impact.

Down . . . and out. Gregg lies in the goal, the ball is in the net. And referee Jack Sherlock ruled: 'A fair charge (by Loft-house) – a good goal'.

Over the bar! And as Harry Gregg leaps to save, Alf McMichael looks on with relief.

Captain of the Irish schoolboys for the game against Wales in 1947. Yes, that's skipper Harry Gregg, wearing the goal-keeper's jersey, on the back row. Next-but-one to him, on his right, is Jackie Blanchflower, who became a team-mate again at Old Trafford and on the international field.

Happy landing in New York. Manchester United set out on their travels across the U.S. and Canada.

Into battle for the 'friendly' game against Italy at Belfast. Danny Blanchflower, followed by brother Jackie and Harry Gregg, lead the way for Northern Ireland. When the 'friendly'

match ended, the pitch was like a battlefield as fans invaded, intent on venting their displeasure upon the visitors.

Roger Byrne, skipper of United's pre-Munich side, watches alertly as Harry Gregg gets down to this shot.

First cap. Manchester United team-mates Bill Foulkes, Harry Gregg and Dennis Viollet congratulate Jimmy Nicholson on being chosen to play for Northern Ireland.

Northern Ireland: McIlroy, Casey, Peacock, Blanchflower (D.), Bingham, Jones, Cush, Cunningham, Gregg, McParland, McMichael.

Mind my head! Here's Harry Gregg punching the ball clear as Billy McAdams (Bolton) goes up with him for the ball.

A poison pen letter in which the writer expresses his views. But Harry Gregg has some opinions, too, about the writers of such notes.

That man Dougan in action for Blackburn Rovers against Manchester United. The man on the ground – Harry Gregg.

Chapter One

SO THIS IS ME

I WAS a wanted man – and the price on my head was £23,000. Quite simply, Manchester United wanted to buy me, and Doncaster Rovers were prepared to sell me – but they wanted a world-record fee to console themselves.

Since that day in December, 1917, I know that many, many people have said that Doncaster Rovers were the winners in the deal which took me to Old Trafford. A lot of folk, including some in Manchester, have also said that the price on my head went to my head – and that I've never been the same man since.

Well, appearances are sometimes deceptive. But you can judge for yourself after you have read my story.

This is only the first chapter in the book; an introduction, if you like. And as I'm introducing myself, let me put you in the picture – the picture of Harry Gregg, as seen by football fans throughout the length and breadth of the country . . . and as seen by Harry Gregg.

In football, they say that you have to be daft to be a goalkeeper. And I don't kid myself – I know that many people think I'm the daftest of them all. Well, I *am* daft – about football.

I have been praised and insulted, cheered and jeered. There are grounds where I'm not welcome, and grounds where I love to play. I've been hailed as a hero, sneered at as a villain, written off as a goalkeeper who can be brilliant one moment, and shocking the next.

But despite the triumphs and the tragedies, the bouquets and the brickbats, I can honestly say that if I had my time all over again, the only thing I would want to do would be to play

football. As a part-timer with Coleraine, the Irish League club, I made £11 a week. I was an amateur with them, and the cash I earned came from my outside trade as a joiner. When I turned professional and signed for Doncaster Rovers, I gambled on my ability to make Soccer a full-time career. As I've said, I was football-daft . . . I signed for £7 a week.

Harry Gregg must seem to many people to be a man of contradictions. I can only put forward one explanation for this – the fact that I am Irish. My hair isn't red, but it wouldn't take an awful lot of dye to change that; and I am afflicted with the true Irish temperament – or should it be temper?

Irishmen are noted for their love of a good scrap, especially if they get the chance of joining in. And there are folk who think that I go looking for trouble.

I have been knifed during a football match; I have been jeered at as the so-and-so who laid an England international out cold; I have been the subject of discussion about a possible prosecution after a football fan received a 'shiner'. There are even people in Manchester itself who are prepared to believe that I indulge in drinking to excess and go around spoiling for a fight.

Like many other footballers, I have been the target for anonymous letters – the worst one threatened to 'do me in' if I didn't 'throw' a game. But, like every other footballer, I ignore such scurrilous abuse.

As well as letters of the poison-pen variety, I have had hundreds of nice ones, too, and many times I have been deeply touched by other expressions of regard from people I don't even know.

Such as the two girls – Manchester United supporters, of course – who came to my home one day and made an impromptu presentation to me on the doorstep. They had brought with them a small parcel, and they handed it to me with some suitably mumbled appreciation.

When I took the wrapping off the parcel, I discovered a small,

silver cup. On it was inscribed: 'The greatest sportsman in the world'. I had never seen these two girls before, but I can tell you in all sincerity that they made me feel both humble and proud.

I remember also the two girls who call at my home twice a year without fail. Each time is the eve of a birthday for my elder daughter, Linda, or my younger, Karen. Each time the girls press a birthday gift into my hands when I open the door. If it's Linda's birthday, they don't forget Karen – there is a gift of sweets for the baby of our family; if it's Karen's birthday, there are sweets to keep Linda happy, too.

Truthfully, I never know whether or not to ask the youngsters in – I don't know if they or I would be the more embarrassed. So I end up by mumbling some expression of gratitude. And in case they have never been able to understand my swift-flowing Irish brogue, I should like to say a sincere 'Thank you' now to those girls for their kindly actions.

The truth about Harry Gregg? – It's a mixture, of course. With my Irish blood, I'm impulsive – easily roused to anger, quick to cool down. But mostly I'm just like any other family man who goes out to do a job of work every day.

I leave home in my car to go to the ground for training, and when I get to Old Trafford I do my work as hard and as conscientiously as possible. I try never to shirk.

When training is over, I return home for lunch – if the players are not lunching together – and I get back to my family as quickly as possible. I admit to having a liking for speed – but in case any policeman should read this, I modestly submit that I always try to keep my speed down to 30.

Having arrived home, I stay there. I never go out to the pub for a drink, although (in case you suspect I'm trying to appear whiter than white) I do smoke. As my 'second trade' is joinery, I sometimes work in the garage on something for the home. And on Sunday nights I go to church.

Yes, my everyday life is as simple as that. This is the Harry Gregg that the folk who pack the terraces never see.

Am I a big-head? – I may be biased, but I believe that the answer is 'No'. On the football field, I play to win; all the time, every time. Like every other goalkeeper, I sometimes make good saves which bring me praise . . . and I sometimes let a soft one through. I admit that I have been concerned in more than one controversial incident which has hit the newspaper headlines; but I can honestly say that the headlines have never been of my own seeking. Yet so many actions on the field can lead to an exaggerated reputation.

At the same time, I know that it is my nature to act first and think afterwards, that so long as I go on playing football I shall do things on the spur of the moment which – sometimes – I may regret later. It has always been like that; it always will be. No man can change his temperament, especially in the moment of action, whether it be on the battlefield or on the football field.

This is The Harry Gregg Story – a faithful record of my career in football. I have been concerned in some hotly-disputed incidents; some amusing ones, too; and in one tragic incident which will never be forgotten – the Munich disaster.

Inevitably, therefore, part of this story must be concerned with Munich. I feel reluctant to write about that terrible day – and the days that immediately followed – because so many people were intimately involved, and I should hate to cause them further grief by recalling painful memories.

However, as I say, I realise that I cannot avoid the subject, since Munich played a significant part in my football life. So I must set down the facts as they concerned me personally.

When I think about Munich, I know I am a lucky man. I was spared to continue a career which I love. And I say, without false sentiment or shame, that my life is guided by two aims: to lead a happy family life with my wife and two children, and to give satisfaction to 'the boss', Mr Matt Busby, in the job I do . . . which is playing football. So now, if you're still with me, we'll begin The Harry Gregg Story.

Chapter Two

I BREAK INTO FOOTBALL

I NEVER walk past the Showground – where Coleraine, my home-town team, play – without thinking of the day I broke into football . . . literally. I thought I was going to finish up in jail.

Of course, I had played football at school – one of my school-boy-international team-mates was Jackie Blanchflower – but I took my first real plunge into the atmosphere of professional football the day I tried to sneak into the Showground without paying. I was 14 – and broke.

Coleraine reserves were playing Linfield reserves (the Swifts, as they are known), and I climbed over the tin ‘wall’ of the ground. No sooner had I landed than I was ‘pinched’. I had visions of being hauled off to jail, but I got the surprise of my life.

I was told that Coleraine were a man short, and I was asked if I would keep goal that afternoon. Would I? – I ran home for my boots as if life itself were at stake.

We lost, 4-1. The Linfield centre-forward took two penalties during the game, and scored from one. I’m certain he missed the other on purpose.

Not one of the Coleraine officials took any notice of me after the match, and I thought, disappointed: ‘Well, they can’t have been very impressed by me’. But as I was leaving the ground two men did stop me. One had silver hair, the other wore glasses. And when they said, ‘Well done’, that made my day. For in the man with the silver hair I recognised the legendary Joe Bambrick, who once scored six goals when playing at centre-forward for Northern Ireland. The other man was Jack Smith, a Linfield official.

A month later, Jack turned up at my home, having travelled 60 miles from Belfast, and asked if I would sign amateur forms for 'The Blues'. Despite the fact that we lived in Coleraine, my father was 'Blues' mad, and he soon made up my mind for me. 'Of course Harry will sign,' he said. And I did.

Twice a week I travelled to Belfast for training – I was an apprentice joiner the rest of the time – and for more than two years I was happy. The only bit of bad luck I had was in a game for the third team, Linfield Rangers.

We played on a ground which belonged to a lunatic asylum, and during this match I injured a wrist. My most embarrassing moment came afterwards, when colleagues had to strip me and bath me . . . while some of the asylum patients, who had watched the game, looked on!

When I caught my train for home, the wrist was painful. But by the time I had reached Ballymoney, the last stop before Coleraine, it was *agony*. The wrist looked like a blown-up balloon.

I hopped out of the train at Ballymoney, with only one thought in mind – to find a doctor. When I did, he said I must go to hospital to have the wrist set in plaster – and warned me that I must not treat the injury lightly as one of the main bones was broken. There was a danger that I would lose the use of the wrist, and that the fingers would end up bent inwards like claws.

At the hospital, I was told the plaster cast must remain on for 13 weeks. After six weeks, I tested the wrist – plaster cast and all – in a match. It seemed all right. And a few weeks later, I was chosen to play in a youth team which was to take part in a tournament in Liverpool. I'd never been to England . . . and I could not risk missing this trip.

I decided – headstrong youth that I was – to dispense with that plaster cast. With some effort, I prised it off. And in Liverpool I played in three games. When I returned home, I didn't tell the doctor I'd been playing football – I just said the cast

had come loose, and that I had *had* to slip it off the day before.

I was ordered back to hospital and on went another cast. It remained on for seven weeks – and then once more I removed it. This time it stayed off.

At Linfield I made steady progress. Then came a spot of bother which eventually led to my decision to leave the Windsor Park club.

You see, at Linfield a player knew whether or not he was in the team, by looking at the dressing-room pegs. If his boots were on the appropriate peg, he was in.

On this particular day, the second team was engaged in an important cup game, and I was looking forward to the big match. I never gave it a thought that I might not be chosen, and it was no more than I expected when I saw my boots on the appropriate peg in the dressing-room. But there was trouble ahead.

In stormed another goalkeeper, who took a look at the peg and then walked out of the room in anger. Then, a few minutes later, an official came in, unhooked my boots, and came over to tell me I wasn't playing. The other player had evidently sorted things out to his satisfaction, at the highest level. And I was left feeling furious.

So when the club asked me to re-sign for the following season, I refused – point-blank. And on the scene came Coleraine . . . who, apparently, had decided after all that if I could make the grade with glamour-club Linfield, I would be an acquisition for my home-town team. They promised a regular first-team place if I signed for them. I must admit I felt sorry for the man in possession, an amateur international, but . . .

I felt even more sorry – for myself – after my *début* against Ards. We lost, 5-1 . . . and I was almost run out of town!

Weeks passed before Coleraine dared restore me to the first team. However, when I did get back, things started to go right. I played for the Irish amateur side and before long I had my biggest honour – being chosen for the Irish League against the

English League. And *that* meant almost the full international side.

The English League opposition was: Merrick; Ball, Garrett; Wright, Froggatt, Dickinson; Finney, Pearson, Lofthouse, Broadis, Rowley. A great side, you must agree!

For almost a fortnight before the big game, I found sleep difficult. I lay awake at nights almost dazzled by my good fortune. I felt that I had indeed had some lucky breaks – even the row with Linfield seemed like a blessing in disguise.

We lost the big game, 9-0 and we were so much on the defensive that I reckoned our centre-forward touched the ball ten times during that match – each time he kicked-off from the centre-spot.

It seemed my star was rising. There was even talk that glamorous clubs across the water were interested in me. Glasgow Rangers, Hibernian, Manchester United – yes, Manchester United, the club which later paid Doncaster Rovers a record fee of £23,000 for a goalkeeper when I was transferred to Old Trafford. *Then*, I could have been had for the trifling sum of £1,500, plus another £500 after a dozen first-team appearances. For that was what Doncaster Rovers paid for me.

The transfer talk was brought to a head, so far as manager Arthur Milne was concerned, when he overheard a director telling me one day that Burnley had been on the phone and wanted me to go for a month's trial. Arthur butted in to say: 'If you're good enough to cross the Channel, you're good enough to cross it permanently. Why, it would take you a month to acclimatise yourself to the atmosphere at Burnley, let alone show them what you can do'.

The trial was washed out. Arthur made me promise that if any more transfer talk arose, I would do nothing without telling him. It was a promise I soon broke.

By now I was working for one of the directors at my 'outside' trade as a joiner. One day this director came into the workshop, shooed away the apprentice, and told me that Doncaster wanted

me. Peter Doherty, then Doncaster player-manager, was arriving that day, and the director would bring him to my home that evening.

The stars were really in my eyes. As soon as work was over, I hurried home to smarten myself up and change into my best suit. I was eager to impress the great Peter Doherty that I was a smart lad. But when half the evening had passed and there was still no sign of Peter and the director, I became dispirited.

I changed into overalls and old football boots, and went out to a field near home to have a kick-about. I gave vent to my feeling of bitter disappointment by hammering that ball as hard as possible. And that was how Peter Doherty saw me when he did arrive – I was muddy, scruffy, and dishevelled.

But in my excitement, I forgot about wanting to look smart. I forgot, too, the promise I had made to Arthur Milne. When Peter left, though, there were still a few details to be settled, but I knew I was bound for Doncaster – on a one-way ticket across the Channel.

I had been told to do some work at the ground the next day, so that I would be easily accessible when the moment came for the transfer forms to be signed. And, of course, I had to turn professional before I did sign.

While I was waiting, Arthur Milne came up and asked me if it were true about Doncaster. Shamefacedly, I confessed. I never felt so small in my life – but I went to Doncaster, just the same.

It was another world, and so far as I was concerned, Doncaster Rovers were the best club in England. My first dig-mates were inside-forward Tommy Martin and centre-half Bill Pater-son. Many a time I massaged Bill's ankles with the landlady's machine oil to make them more supple . . .

Bill was making a name for himself, and in due course was transferred to Newcastle United for £22,500. Not so long after that, he moved on again and is now back in Scotland, playing for the No. 1 team there, Glasgow Rangers.

Before the end of that season, Doncaster had paid up the

extra £500 to Coleraine, because I had made the required number of first-team appearances. My début, in fact, was on January 24, 1953, against Blackburn Rovers. And at half-time, with a 3-1 lead, we were doing pretty well.

The second half was only minutes old when tragedy struck for me. Blackburn centre-forward Tommy Briggs – who later went to manage Irish League club Glentoran – challenged me for a ball. One of my full-backs came across, too. And in the resulting collision, I had my right arm shattered. Two bones near the elbow were smashed, and I was carried off.

For weeks I was unable to straighten the arm – it was, in fact, twisted inwards, and when the doctor said that any more improvement would have to be up to me, I felt desperate. I turned towards a man who had helped and advised me from the moment I had arrived in Doncaster. He was Bill Gold, who had played for Wolves, Bournemouth and Doncaster. Like me, he had played in goal; now he was a physiotherapist.

I had spent hours at Bill's home, almost every night of the week, talking football and getting tips on improving my game. Bill and I had become very close – in fact, Bill and his wife treated me as if I were their own son. Now, once more, I turned to Bill for help.

Day after day he treated that arm – I felt like a Frankenstein monster as, with the arm encased in a mass of wires, Bill encouraged me to persevere with the treatment. First I was able to move only my fingers; then, gradually, I managed to get the arm more supple. And finally, I was able to face the future again – a future which included first-class Soccer. By April I was back in football, instead of back on the boat for Ireland, as I had begun to fear.

By the end of the season I was keeping goal regularly for the first team, and when I did return home for the close season, I felt that I had established myself. What's more, I vowed to myself that next season would see me holding the job down from the word 'go'.

I was still football-daft, of course, and one day, a few weeks after I had arrived home, I joined some youngsters in a kick-about. I got a kick too – on the foot; and I finished up walking home in pain. I tried to kid my mother that nothing was wrong, and went out for a cycle ride. But the pain in my foot each time I pressed the pedal was agonising – and, unable to steer a straight course, I fell off the bike. That convinced me my ankle was broken.

The doctor at the hospital told me I would have to wear a plaster cast for three months. It seemed like a life sentence! After a few weeks, my impulsive Irish temperament got the upper hand again. I decided to test the ankle by kicking a ball. I found it was no trouble at all.

Shortly before I was due to return to Doncaster – and with my eye still on that first-team place – I deliberately cracked the plaster cast, to see how my foot felt without its protection.

My foot seemed to me to be sound enough, so I went back to the hospital, hoping they would remove the cracked cast. They did – and replaced it with another. I became desperate in my ambitions to play as soon as the season started. Rashly, I took a hammer and a pair of pliers, and prised off *this* cast.

I bound the foot and ankle tightly with bandages, but as I walked up the gangplank of the boat taking me back to England, I felt a jab of pain. Back in Doncaster, I took a bus to the ground when I reported for training, and tested the ankle by leaping off just before the bus reached the stop. The club sent me back to hospital, where I was told I should really have another cast put on. I dug in my heels – if you will pardon the expression – and insisted that if I could jump off a bus, I could play football without a plaster cast.

We compromised. No cast – but no training. To strengthen the ankle, I was allowed to walk around the training track as many times as I liked. And I didn't get that place in the first team for the kick-off.

Looking back, I can see I must have been a problem boy in

those days. Many folk would say I'm still impulsive to the point of recklessness – especially during the heat of a match.

Those injuries I 'treated' myself years ago could have turned out far more serious than they did. I hope I'd be a wiser man today – in fact, I'm sure I could restrain myself from ripping off a plaster cast just because I wanted to play football on a Saturday!

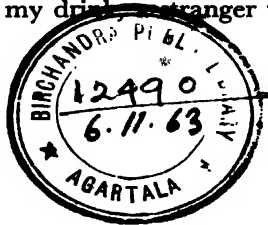
Once again I can only blame my impetuosity on my Irish temperament – and it has landed me in some funny situations. For instance there was the time Peter Doherty arranged a benefit game for his brother, Kevin, a Coleraine player. Peter rounded up such stars as John Charles, Charlie Tully, Bertie Peacock, the late Leon Leuty, Len Graham, Raich Carter (then managing Leeds) – and myself and Jimmy Delaney, of Manchester United fame.

Jimmy was then the idol of Derry – he had steered the club to an Irish Cup triumph – and he was on the opposite side to me in the benefit game.

During the game, the whistle went – I think it must have been for offside. At any rate, I went out and leaped up to catch the loose ball . . . just as Jimmy, who must not have heard the whistle, came racing in. My hunched knees caught him full in the face. I went flying over him, and we lay side by side until we were carried off. It was 10.30 that night before Jimmy recovered consciousness. If memory serves me right, I believe he had a fractured jaw – I know about a score of stitches were put in his face. And my knees were killing me.

The next day I went to hospital to visit him. While I was there, I was asked to go for an X-Ray on my knees. The collision had sent a lot of Jimmy's teeth flying, and two were still unaccounted for. There seemed to be a suspicion that they might have embedded themselves in my knees!

There was a sequel the next day, when I went to Derry to watch a game there. After this match, I went with a friend for a glass of lemonade. As I sat having my drink, a stranger walked



in and parked himself next to me. He began to tell me all about the previous night's game, and the diabolical treatment Harry Gregg had meted out to poor Jimmy Delaney. As the stranger blackened my character more and more, I felt anger welling up inside me. At last, I could stand it no longer; bursting with pent-up fury, I jumped to my feet and hotly informed the stranger that I was the 'blackguard' he had been discussing.

The man began to stammer apologies, adding – in that charming manner peculiar to the Irish – that he hadn't realised who I was, and that he could have 'put his feet down his throat' for saying the things he had. I yelled at him: 'If I hear any more, I'll put *my* feet down your throat!'

I was so furious I might have tried, too . . . but my friend persuaded me that an exit on such a note was triumph enough.

There were times at Doncaster, too, when my Irish blood rose and I said things I later regretted. I was chased out of Peter Doherty's office more times than I remember – but there was one occasion when we had the row to end all rows. It ended with Peter buttoning up his coat and pushing his chair under his desk . . . and me wondering if this was the prelude to a stand-up fight! More than once Peter told me that my trouble was I'd seen too many cowboy films . . .

Oddly enough, it was Ken Hardwick, then fighting to regain his first-team place, who indirectly started this spot of bother. In a practice match, he slammed in a shot which I failed to hold, and when he raced in for the kill, his foot caught my hand. Two fingers were bent backward at an almost impossible angle.

I knew instantly that they had been dislocated, and I raced quarter of a mile from the pitch to the ground, where the trainer tried all he knew to get those fingers back in position. He couldn't manage it, so I made yet another trip to hospital, where my fingers were heavily bandaged.

The following week, after missing one game, I declared myself fit to play. But to my disappointment – and annoyance – I was chosen for the reserve side.

Off I dashed to see Peter Doherty, who told me that he didn't want to take any chances with my recent injury. I retorted that if I wasn't fit to play in the senior side, I wasn't fit enough to turn out for the reserves.

Peter told me not to try to dictate to him – and he ordered me to turn out for the reserves. I refused . . . and on the Friday I watched the game from the stand. I watched Saturday's game too, – then on the Sunday came the summons. I was to see Peter in his office next morning. When I went to face Peter and the music, I anticipated suspension. But Peter had changed his tactics.

He *asked* me if I would play for the reserves that day. Molli-fied, I agreed. I must admit I had been breaking my heart all week-end for a game of football.

Not long afterwards I had another brush with Doncaster, who at the time were struggling. I had been chosen for Northern Ireland, but it was put to me that I might sacrifice my cap and put my club first – think of the headlines that would make, I was told.

My reply was that my wife and family couldn't eat newspaper cuttings, and that I wanted to play for my country *and* earn the international fee. After all, there was always the chance that once out, I might never get back, too.

Finally the point was made that I was due a benefit shortly, and that if I persisted in playing for Northern Ireland, there was no telling how the club would view my loyalty – or lack of it. I took what I considered to be the hint – and the newspaper headlines looked just fine.

But if all my days at Doncaster were not plain sailing, this much I would like to stress. I owe Peter Doherty, my fellow-countryman and first English club manager, as much as I owe any man in football. When I arrived, raw and unknown, at Doncaster, Peter – still playing in those days – really gave me the treatment. Day after day he hammered the ball at me from all angles. Sometimes after a session I felt I could hardly stand.

But Peter persevered with his plan for grooming me – and he was a fair taskmaster, if a hard one.

My reward for the hours of striving to improve my game was a cap for Northern Ireland against Wales in 1954–55 season. The funny thing about it was that I was keeping goal for the *third* team at the time. Ken Hardwick was in the senior line-up, and the day the Irish selectors were due to watch me our reserves had no match. So I was put in the ‘shop window’ with the third string.

When I gave away a penalty, I thought my hopes of a cap had vanished. But I must have impressed the selectors sufficiently, for I was chosen for the game against Wales. Yet in the end, I so nearly didn’t make it.

The international was on a Wednesday, and the previous Saturday I was playing for Doncaster reserves against Scarborough. I saved a penalty, palmed the ball out – and in came the forward to put the finishing touch to the job. I got his boot in my back, and I was paralysed with pain.

On the Sunday I went for treatment, but I could hardly stand up, so intense was the pain. The next morning I was due to travel with fellow-international Len Graham to join the rest of the Irish team at Rhyl. Peter Doherty was following later, as he was playing in an all-star game at Port Vale.

I sat in the dressing-room that Sunday morning and the tears rolled down my face as I faced the fact that I would have to withdraw from the big game. But Peter would not let it go at that, and suggested I travel with him to Port Vale and hope that constant treatment might get me fit. While Peter played in that all-star match, I was on the treatment table. As the Vale trainer strove to ease the pain in my back, I could hear the fans cheering the men who were out there playing.

So Peter and I joined the players at Rhyl, and they must have wondered what sort of crock I was. While they went for a walk, I was getting treatment; while they played cards or billiards, or went shopping, I was getting treatment. But it brought results in the end, and I was able to play.

Ten minutes before the match began, I was given three pain-killing injections. After that, I forgot any worries I had about the game! And it was a happy début, after all, for we won, 2-1.

That was when I met Jackie Blanchflower for the first time since schoolboy days. Jackie had gone to Old Trafford, and it was a happy re-union at Rhyl. I have cause to remember Jackie with gratitude, for I have the feeling that he played some part in the transfer moves which led to me joining him at Old Trafford.

So at 20, I had come a long way since that day, six years earlier, when I had sneaked into the Showground at Coleraine. I still didn't even begin to dream of the things fate had in store for me . . . but gradually, as time wore on at Doncaster, I sensed that my days there seemed to be numbered.

Domestic troubles inside the club – in which, indirectly, I had unknowingly and unwillingly sparked off – led to a meeting with the chairman. I don't intend to go into the details – indeed, it would be impossible for me to do so – except to say that no blame was laid at my door for the unhappy events which almost tore the club apart.

But it was during our talk that the chairman revealed that big clubs were showing an interest in me.

Something told me the recent troubles would end in a parting of the ways for manager and club – and I felt that without Peter Doherty, Doncaster would mean nothing to me. I reminded Peter of the promise he had made when I first arrived – that if the *right* club came along, he would not stand in my way. Such were my thoughts as the possibility of a transfer became apparent.

Sheffield Wednesday, it was said, had offered £18,000 for me – and been turned down. Manchester United had joined the hunt – and been turned down. By now I was in a fever of excitement; the suspense of not knowing what the future held for me became unbearable.

When the news was confirmed that Manchester United – *the*

club in England – wanted me, I knew that I wanted to go to Old Trafford, where Mr Busby had built up such a wonderful array of talent. The first team glittered with star names; the club was always in the thick of the fight for honours, whether for the League championship, the F.A. Cup, or the European Cup. What more could any player ask than to be allowed to join 'such a club'?

A week before I was transferred to United, I had watched them play on television. With me was a Doncaster team-mate, Tommy Cavanagh. Pointing to the United players on the field, he said: 'You'll be one of them before long'. Tommy didn't suspect a thing, of course, but how soon his prediction came true!

The night before I did sign, I could bear the suspense no longer. I went out and 'phoned Peter Doherty's home. He was out – but Mrs Doherty added: 'I can't say anything except that he could be doing you a good turn'.

I couldn't imagine what must be going on, but my mind explored every possibility – and that night sleep came hard to me as I tossed and turned, wondering what sort of good turn it was that Mrs Doherty had mentioned.

Down I went to the ground for training next morning, and was told to return to the ground at 2.30 in the afternoon. I had barely arrived when a club official told me to go to the car park and get in his car. Moments later the official arrived and as we drove along, it seemed to me that we took every twist and turn down the back streets of Doncaster.

I had no idea where I was going, and the official didn't even enlighten me – until we arrived outside Peter Doherty's house. In I went – and there were Peter and Mrs Doherty.

There, too, were forms laid out neatly, awaiting my signature, and I realised that I was about to be asked to join another club. But what an air of mystery there was! When reporters were spotted near the house, I had to dodge down on the floor below window level, and then the curtains were drawn to keep out

prying eyes. And I still didn't know *which* club was hoping to get my signature on the dotted line.

Then the door of the room opened . . . and there was Matt Busby. All my secret fears and hopes were answered as I saw him. For the first time, I *knew* the moment had come for me to join Manchester United.

After the introductions, Mr Busby said he would like to talk to ~~me~~ alone. And immediately he made it plain that United didn't pay anyone 'funny money' to sign for them. I didn't care about money; I was delighted enough to know United wanted me. 'That saves embarrassing questions,' I remarked.

Mr Busby asked me if I were prepared to join Manchester United – and when I answered 'Yes', he asked whether it was because I wanted to leave Doncaster or because United were the team I really wished to join. When I said that it was not a question of wanting to get away from Doncaster, but a matter of wanting to go to Old Trafford, he seemed satisfied. And I signed the transfer forms.

I didn't know then that my signature would pay the way for more shocks. I didn't know that fate held tragedy and triumph in store for me. How could I? – I was so happy because I was joining the club I considered to be the greatest in the world. And even if I had been able to see into the future, I cannot honestly say that I would have refused to sign those forms.

There was glory to come – an F.A. Cup Final; European Cup ties; headlines and praise. There was tragedy to come – Munich; the indignity of being dropped; the brick-bats as well as the bouquets.

But I say again: I could not honestly wish that I had never left Doncaster. Football with Manchester United has given me too many memories – even if some of them are painful – for me to regret having thrown in my lot at Old Trafford.

Chapter Three

A HOLE IN MY SHOE

BEFORE I signed for Manchester United I had been to Old Trafford only once in my life – as a paying spectator at the Stretford end. At the time I was out of the Doncaster team because I had an arm injury, and I went to watch Manchester United play Newcastle.

I had a special interest in the game that day, because Bill Paterson, one of the men who had made me welcome when I arrived at Doncaster, was in the Newcastle team.

The big centre-half had been transferred two weeks earlier for £22,500 and I little thought then that United would pay even more than that for a goalkeeper – or that I would be the man on whom they laid out a record fee.

The next time I visited Old Trafford was on the morning of United's match against Leicester. And as I stepped off the train this time, there was a welcoming committee of manager Busby, Jackie Blanchflower and his wife, Jean . . . and a posse of reporters and photographers.

I felt dazzled and dazed by the publicity which surrounded my transfer. But many a time since that day I've realised what a good publicity agent Mr Busby is for Manchester United. And *that* is intended as a compliment. Many football fans outside Manchester – and some in the city – have often complained that United always seem to be hogging the headlines. I know – I've heard folk moan that they're sick and tired of reading about the team that Busby built.

All I can say is that if their own clubs don't get the same sort of publicity, they should blame their managers, not snipe at the United boss or the club he manages. For Mr Busby knows only

too well the value of good publicity. I can never recall an occasion when he refused to talk to newspapermen or answer even the most awkward questions. And that cannot be said for every manager in the game.

There have been times, of course, when the Press have given Mr Busby, Manchester United, Harry Gregg and other United players the big stick. But 'the boss' has always remained urbane and accessible.

I have known him lose that gentle smile only when the good name of the club has been questioned. That doesn't go down well with him – for, as he has emphasised to his players over and over again, so far as he is concerned, Manchester United is bigger than any one man. And I know from experience that before Mr Busby goes out to sign a player, the private background of that player is weighed up.

I found out later, for instance, that in my own case 'the boss' asked Jackie Blanchflower what sort of man I was off the field. And if his answer hadn't been satisfactory, I don't think I'd be at Old Trafford now.

That Saturday morning Jackie was one of the welcoming committee. After the photographers had been satisfied, I was whisked off to a local golf club to meet my new team mates – and within an hour of being introduced to them I went through one of the most embarrassing moments of my life.

I was invited to join in a game of snooker before lunch, and at one point I knew I should have to lean over the table in order to make a difficult shot. I couldn't stretch far enough and I made a mess of the shot. Some of the boys kidded me, saying they hoped I was better at keeping goal than I was at playing snooker.

I daren't explain – though I felt my face colouring up – why I couldn't 'get down' to that snooker shot. The real reason was that I was afraid to stand on tip-toe . . . because there was a hole in the sole of one of my shoes. For the rest of the day, until I returned to Doncaster, I walked about flat-footed; scared what

the boys would think if they laid bare my guilty secret. Many a time we laugh about it now.

Though the boys made me feel welcome; though I'd played with Jackie Blanchflower for Northern Ireland and against Roger Byrne, Duncan Edwards and Tommy Taylor in games against England; though I told myself inwardly that I was one of them . . . I still felt this couldn't be happening to me. I was the dreamy-eyed kid, the autograph hunter among a cluster of stars.

As I walked into the dressing-room for the first time, I felt that I would waken up and find this exciting moment just wasn't true. Then I heard the boss – as he does before every game – tell all of us to go out and play our normal game, and I realised the time for action had come.

As I walked on the field, all trace of nervousness left me. The transfer fee didn't worry me, and I was able to persuade myself that this was just another game. Things went right for me, too, and United beat Leicester 4-0.

After the match Mr Busby spoke three words especially to me. He said: 'Well done, son'. And I felt that if I were given the chance, I might take my place alongside the other stars and before long become one of them.

It took me less than a week to appreciate one of the differences between the new way of life and the old. At Doncaster, each player was allowed up to 35s when he needed a new pair of boots – and more than one player had told me I was mad when I forked another 10 bob out of my own pocket to buy boots which really suited my needs. Some of my Doncaster teammates had maintained that a professional footballer should not have to pay for his own boots – but I felt that I'd rather go on the field happy about my playing gear than quibble over 10s.

I'm not criticising Doncaster when I say that things were different at Old Trafford. Doncaster Rovers had to watch every penny of expenditure – and all the players there knew it, or should have done. United were wealthy – though they hadn't always been – and could afford to do things in the style which

people expected of them. After all, they were *the* glamour club of Britain.

In that first week with United, I got a new pair of boots. They cost £6 6s – and they were on the club. That doesn't mean that I was a better goalkeeper just because my boots cost more; but it is one little instance of the United way of doing things.

If I ever saw a youngster at Old Trafford cribbing about what he imagined was a hardship, I should be the first to tell him he didn't know when he was well-off. Indeed, looking back, I'm glad I came up the hard way; and I don't think anyone with sense is any the worse for that. It does you good to remember sometimes that the higher you go, the harder you can fall.

United had said they would fix me up with a club house – Jeff Whitefoot had just been transferred to Nottingham Forest – and I was waiting to move in. But soon after I joined United, an incident happened which showed that I wasn't a household name around Manchester yet.

We were playing away, and as I knew I would arrive back in Manchester just too late to catch an early-evening train back to Doncaster, I arranged to go to Jackie Blanchflower's home and wait there until my next train, which left about midnight.

Jackie and his wife were going out, but Jackie had said he would leave the key in the garage. 'You'll be warm, and you'll be able to have a sit-down in comfort at least,' he said. 'I'll leave the key in the garage,' added Jackie.

I began to think he wasn't such a good friend, after all when I found the only door this key would open was the one to the coal-place. I hunted again, and found another key. This time I was able to enter the house. But barely 10 minutes had passed when the front door bell rang.

When I opened the door, I saw a man. For what seemed like minutes we stared at each other without speaking. Then the man asked if Jackie was in. I said he wasn't. Could I give Jackie a message?

No, said the man – then he added that he knew Jackie and his wife were going out that night. We still stood staring at each other, and it was plain that he certainly hadn't the faintest idea who I was. I explained I was the new goalkeeper, and was waiting until my train went.

Then my visitor, obviously relieved, gave his explanations. He'd seen the lights go on – and thought the Blanchflowers had burglars. Jackie told me afterwards that the neighbour had had a poker in his hand behind his back . . . and that his wife was hiding round the corner, ready to come to the rescue should there be a struggle!

After a month at Old Trafford, I felt I was settling in. Things were going well for the club and for me, and I was enjoying my new life. I looked forward especially to my first European Cup game, against Red Star. We beat them, 2-1 . . . but what a hammering I got for the goal they scored. Inside-left Lazar Tasic got the ball and appeared as if he were going to beat a defender. I began to move out of goal, to try to put him off his shot when the moment came. Suddenly, from 30 yards, he let go. He didn't wait for the defender's tackle, but slammed that ball at me as I advanced. The ball sailed over my head, hit the bar – and dropped into the net. I don't know whether, from the corner of his eye, he had seen me start to come out – but that sudden shot was either quick thinking or desperation on his part.

After the game I had a chat with Mr Busby about that goal, and explained my reason for coming out from my line. I said that if I were faced with the same situation again, I would make the same decision. That was the way I kept goal, the way which came naturally to me.

'The boss' quickly reassured me. 'That's what I bought you for – I don't want you to be just a goal-line 'keeper. And I will tell you when I think you're wrong.'

That's one of the reasons Mr Busby is a great manager, in my book. Occasionally he will step in with a few softly-spoken words of advice; but mainly he allows you to play the game as it comes

naturally to you. That way, he believes, a team achieves the best results.

Oddly enough, the night before the late and great Frank Swift, of Manchester City fame, was killed at Munich, he gave me the same advice as Mr Busby had done. Frank and I were talking football, as usual. And this giant of a man, who had won almost legendary fame as a goalkeeper, said to me: 'Don't stay on your line. Remember, you're the boss in the penalty area'.

I have always believed that myself. And that's the way I have always played – although I know that within a few weeks of my joining United, there were arguments between fans as to whether Matt Busby had bought a goalkeeper or a centre-half!

In fact, the very news that Manchester United were seeking a new goalkeeper had caused a minor sensation among the United fans. Many were the arguments about the club's need for a new man – and certainly the news must have come as a terrific surprise to the man in possession, England international Ray Wood.

After the first shock, Ray took a few hours to consider his position at the club, and decided that he would try to fight his way back into the team. It was a brave decision to make, and I had to admire him for it; I hoped that I would have done the same thing had I been in his place.

So far as our personal relations were concerned, I can only say that Ray made a point of wishing me the best of luck with United, and, indeed, we became firm friends.

If my signing had been a shock to Ray and the fans, my new team-mates soon received a shock from me. I hadn't been at Old Trafford long when they began to get suspicious about my sanity. It started the day they discovered a cigarette end in my cap.

I always took a cap on the field in case I needed to shade my eyes from the sun, and when I wasn't wearing the cap, I dropped it on the ground at the back of the net.

After one match, as I popped it on the dressing-room bench, a cigarette end fell out. How it got there I had no idea – but

one of the lads spotted it. And straight away, with an incredulous look, he asked me if I smoked during a game.

Noting his shocked expression and thinking quickly, I answered: 'Oh I sometimes have a draw when things are quiet'. That did it.

My words, spoken in jest, were taken seriously. And when I realised the boys really believed I was daft enough to have a quick 'drag' when I thought no-one was looking, I decided to keep the joke going.

So before every game, I made a point of putting a cigarette and a few matches in my cap – and making sure that some of the boys saw me. The result was that some of my team-mates swore that I smoked during games. And the story spread around.

In fairness to the boys, I must say they never held it against me – and they didn't split on me to 'the boss'! They were a grand bunch of team-mates, and I am only sorry that I didn't have longer to play with them before the Munich crash tore that great team apart.

But in those few, short weeks before that terrible day which made Manchester a city of mourning, I think I got to know the boys pretty well.

Roger Byrne, for instance, at whose home I stayed one night while I was waiting to move to Manchester. . . . Many people thought that on the field and off the field, Roger was inclined to be cocky. But I didn't find him so. If there was any talking to be done, Roger did it – but he was skipper of Manchester United and, in that position, was the right man to speak for the players and the club.

On the field, he was often criticised for his habit of trying to play football in his own penalty area. Many people accused him of showing off and being clever because he didn't always give the ball the big boot, even when opposing forwards were harassing him near his own goal. Yet the thing Roger was doing in those days is what players like Di Stefano and Puskas, of Real Madrid, are acclaimed for in this country today! Yes, the

very people who called Roger Byrne cocky think it's wonderful when they see Stefano 'playing football' in his own penalty area.

What about the rest of the stars of that pre-Munich era? – Well, Roger had as deputy a left-back called Geoff Bent. I played against Geoff in practice games – and I found it easy to believe what I heard some of the boys say about him. They reckoned that if there had been no Roger Byrne, Geoff Bent would have been Manchester United's left-back – and England's too. One of the ironies of Munich was that Geoff need never have gone to Belgrade for that second-leg European Cup-tie against Red Star. He travelled only in case Roger, who was doubtful through injury, could not play. But Roger passed a fitness test after we arrived in Belgrade, and Geoff sat the game out. Neither Roger nor Geoff returned alive. . . .

. At right-half there was Eddie Coleman, a player who, to me at any rate, didn't look like a footballer.

From a seat in the stand, maybe, he gave the impression of being almost too frail to stand a heavy tackle. But get a close-up of Eddie, and you saw that he was beefily built. Eddie was a practical joker – and a fine player.

He has been named the player with the Marilyn Monroe wiggle . . . swivel-hips . . . snake-hips . . . and the soft-shoe shuffler. Without doubt he was a footballing genius.

Had he lived, I don't believe Eddie Coleman would have been overshadowed in any football company. And the first time I saw him play, in my début against Leicester, I could have sworn, as I saw that wiggle leave two opponents standing flat-footed, that the stand and the crowd swayed with Eddie.

Eddie's ambition in every match was to score a goal. And he did just that in the first game against Red Star.

The competition for the centre-half spot was fierce indeed. It seemed to work out that Jackie Blachflower – regarded as the finest schoolboy international Northern Ireland ever produced – got his place when Mark Jones was injured . . . and that Mark

had to wait until injury befell Jackie before he could regain possession. Then the see-saw battle began all over again.

Jackie, the man who smoothed the way so much for me at Old Trafford, was the complete footballer – too much of a footballer, in some people's opinion. Mark was the rugged Yorkshireman who stood no nonsense.

A happy-go-lucky lad, Mark had an accent as broad as the acres of his native county. And no matter what the company, he didn't try to change. He took people as he found them, and expected them to accept him as he was. He detested folk who put on airs or changed their accent according to the company they were in. His play was as uncompromising as his attitude towards what he regarded as snobbery.

And what a tremendous physique this man had! Many a time I've stood and watched with admiration as he punched the speed-ball in the gym. I'm told that Mark chose football, though there was the chance of a boxing career; and I'm told, too, that he would have been just as famous a fighter as he was a footballer. I can believe it.

What can one say about Duncan Edwards, the man who was a football legend almost as soon as he made his first-team début? – I must admit that when I arrived at Old Trafford, I expected to find a person who was slightly self-opinionated, at least. From all I had read, he was the greatest. Surely he must act like it, too. How I had misjudged him! I really believe that few people receiving the adulation Duncan did could have stayed on the rails. In fact, he was the most unassuming person I have ever met.

His consuming interest was in football; but he seemed genuinely embarrassed by what he considered excessive praise of his ability.

Duncan never could get too much football. I remember one occasion when we were training, and at last some of the lads thought we had done enough and that it was time to go back to the ground for a bath and a change. Not Duncan. He stood

his ground and told everyone that they were there to do a real training stint – and that they'd better get on with it, instead of packing 'up a few minutes early. Someone countered by saying that if Duncan was so keen on training, he could come back by himself in the afternoon – 'All right,' said Duncan, 'I will. And *you're* not going yet'.

Travelling to London one day for a game, the boys were talking about possible changes in the England team. This was at a time when Billy Wright was getting the big stick from the Press, and suggestions were being made that England must find a new centre-half. Popular opinion among the group was that Duncan would be the man for the job – but big Duncan was the one dissentient. In the understatement of that or any other year he said: 'I don't think I would make a good centre-half – and I reckon I've been lucky so far. My face fits'.

To say he was lucky to be in the England team was a fantastic remark to make – yet I believed Duncan when he said it. And he went on to assure Mark Jones that if there were a change in the England line-up, he thought Mark would be the man to get the centre-half spot.

And so to the forward line, and a fellow-Irishman. Many people are inclined to think of footballers as being rather rough and boisterous; Billy Whelan would have dispelled that notion in a moment. He was quiet, God-fearing and clean-living. A complete gentleman. Billy would take part in a practical joke – but you knew he would never be the ringleader. He was a great footballer, and I think he found some inner strength from his religious convictions. When I was new to Old Trafford, Billy went out of his way to be friendly. I think it was because he, too, had once been a stranger in the big city, and he recognised how I might feel.

Centre-forward Tommy Taylor was one of the most underestimated men in the game, in my view. He was a big fellow who trained hard and long – I think only John Charles could match him in getting up to a high ball – and he loved his

Soccer. As England's centre-forward he came under fire more than once, and I got the impression that he took this criticism unduly to heart. If there was one man he didn't like to play against, it was Northern Ireland's Jackie Blanchflower – his greatest pal – who always seemed to come off best.

Tommy was happy to be a Manchester United player, and I don't believe he would really have been happy if he had gone to Italy, at the time it was reported that a £65,000 offer had been made for him.

The blaze of publicity had made Tommy feel that he must get away out of the limelight. So he retreated to Wales. About midnight one night, Jackie Blanchflower was knocked up by a newspaper reporter who asked if Jackie could tell him where Tommy Steele was hiding out! It took the sleepy-eyed Jackie a few moments to realise that the reporter – a news man – meant Tommy Taylor. . . .

Afterwards, when Tommy and Jackie were chatting, Jackie asked his pal if he would have liked to try his luck in the land of sunshine and big money. Tommy said: 'There's no point in worrying about what might have been' – and Jackie always believed that secretly, Tommy was glad he had never been forced to make the big decision.

Among that company of great players there were also wingers David Pegg – whose inseparable companion was Bobby Charlton – and Johnny Berry.

David and Johnny, unfortunately, I didn't get to know really well, for the time left for forming friendships was small. But David and I had one thing in common – we both came from Doncaster, David by birth, myself by virtue of having played for the Rovers.

Johnny had cost Manchester United £30,000 when they signed him from Birmingham, and he quickly established himself as a favourite at Old Trafford.

Bobby Charlton I have come to know well. Bobby always seems a little surprised that so many people should almost idolise

him; in fact, I know that his one thought in football is to do his best for Manchester United. He has been dropped from the England team and switched about in United's attack – yet I believe that he wouldn't worry in the slightest if Mr Busby were to tell him that he had been dropped into the 'A' team for Saturday. Bobby is one of the finest clubmen in the country, as well as one of the greatest players.

The day I made my début for United, David Pegg, Johnny Berry, Billy Whelan, Jackie Blanchflower and Ray Wood were dropped. After Munich, only Ray ever played football again.

Chapter Four

DAY OF DISASTER

THE first day of February, 1958, saw Manchester United poised for the final stages of a bid for glory which, if successful, would be unparalleled in the history of British Soccer. The target was threefold – First Division title, F.A. Cup, and European Cup.

We were not leading the League race, but we felt there was a good chance that before the season ended we would overhaul the other aspirants; we were reckoned to be a good bet for the F.A. Cup; and many people thought that United were really just approaching their peak – a peak good enough to lift that European Cup trophy which had been the undisputed property of Real Madrid since the inception of the tournament.

But within a week, fate had struck such a devastating blow that it was to prove the blackest period in the club's history. Ask anyone in Manchester, even now, what Thursday, February 6, 1958, means to them . . . and they will supply the answer in one short word. Munich.

We set off for Belgrade and the second leg of our European Cup battle against Red Star in good heart. We were 2-1 up from the first encounter, and although we knew the magnitude of the task on hand, we were confident of ultimate victory.

We soon knew we had a fight on our hands. The pitch was covered in snow; so much so that the boundary lines had been marked out in red. And the crowd – the most partisan I had ever known – made it clear from the start that they wanted only one team to win. And that wasn't Manchester United. Behind my goal one of the spectators – a man in a long, leather coat – danced like a dervish and shouted himself hoarse every

time Red Star attacked. I imagine also that part of his intention was to distract me.

In the first five minutes, Duncan Edwards received an ankle injury; and before half-time, right-winger Kenny Morgans had stud marks down his thigh. No quarter was asked – and none was given. But when we went in for the interval, it seemed that victory was ours for the taking. We had established a three-goal lead in the first 45 minutes.

About 10 minutes after the restart, I dived for a ball – and took a kick in the stomach for my pains. As the ball was scrambled away, I lay gasping for breath while Roger Bryne, our skipper, yelled like a madman for someone to kick the ball into touch. Roger was also shouting at me to lie perfectly still – why, I didn't fathom out until afterwards.

Then I learned the reason for Roger's concern. Some of the red touchline marking had become smeared on my shorts . . . and Roger, seeing this as I lay in pain after that kick, had thought my life's blood was ebbing away!

In that second half Red Star came back with a bang. In one attack, as a forward surged towards me with the ball, I went out intent on narrowing the scoring angle and finished up sliding way outside the penalty box. My collision with the forward gained Red Star a free-kick, and Kostics scored with his famous swerving shot. But while he was credited with the goal, one of our own players unwillingly shared the honour with him.

Dennis Viollet was the end man of a 'wall' of defenders as Kostics shaped to take the kick; and the ball struck Dennis as it swerved towards goal, and dipped into the left-hand corner of the net.

With the minutes to full time seemingly endless, we lived up to our nickname of 'The Red Devils' as we fought to hold Red Star. But after yet another attack, I was picking the ball from the back of the net again. And then our opponents were awarded a penalty, given against right-back Bill Foulkes. As Bill went with an opponent for the ball, they both fell. Bill struggled up

first – only for his opponent to drag him down again. And the referee – who had interpreted the rules in strange fashion at times – got the idea Bill was trying to push the other fellow down. Red Star scored with the spot-kick, and that meant the match ended as a draw.

But we were happy enough. After all, we had won 5–4 on aggregate and were through to the quarter-finals.

After the game, Frank Swift and I got to talking of the best kind of gloves a goalkeeper could wear under such atrocious conditions. Frank told me that when he played for Manchester City, he used to have some gloves made especially for him. 'I'll get you a pair when we return home,' he promised. Frank never lived to keep his word. In fact, none of us realised what the next day would bring . . .

First of all, there was a mix-up over visas – and I was the one who unwittingly caused it. We had been told to get our passports so that they could be sent ahead to the airport. There was no mention of visas, so when I was going to my room to get my passport, I offered to get Johnny Berry's, as well. It was in his suitcase; and so was his visa. I collected both our passports, dropped Johnny's visa back into the case – and promptly forgot the whole business. But when we reached the airport, it was discovered that Johnny's visa was missing. Luckily, I had my own handy.

The efficient looking Yugoslav woman in charge of proceedings was adamant. No visa, no exit from the country. And Johnny's visa was in his suitcase, which was with the rest of our luggage on the plane! There was about an hour's delay before the matter was sorted out. So we finally took off for Munich, where we were due to refuel before making the last leg of the journey home.

As we touched down at Munich, it was starting to snow. The ground staff took over the plane for refuelling, and it was a welcome break for us as we trooped into the terminal building, glad of the chance to stretch our legs. We were looking forward to the fact that a few more hours would see us home.

When we did get aboard the aircraft again, five of the boys got together at a table and began to play cards. They wanted me to take the vacant sixth seat, but I moved into a backward-facing seat just under the wing of the *Elizabethan*. I'd done pretty well out of the boys at cards the previous night, and now I was enjoying a private little joke. Apparently serious, I told them I'd no intention of ending up a pauper, and they would have to manage without me. In fact, I intended to join them as soon as we were airborne.

The engines took on a deep-throated roar, and we were away – we thought. Specks of snow danced by my window as I watched the wing wheel throwing up the slush. Suddenly the aircraft seemed to go into a skid – and the moments that followed were frightening, as we slewed along before finally grinding to a stop.

Back we went to the start of the runway, and then we were off again. This time the same thing happened – the slush never lessened as it was spewed up by the wing wheel, and I sensed that we were travelling an awfully long way without leaving the ground. This time, however, the skidding and slewing did not seem so pronounced before we stopped once more. It was becoming a familiar – though not a pleasant – routine as we retraced our tracks to the start of the runway.

This time when the aircraft stopped, we were asked to make our way to the terminal building again while a check was carried out on the plane. I bought a packet of cigarettes at a kiosk – a purchase for which Jackie Blanchflower laughingly chided me. 'You don't want those German cigarettes,' he said . . . but he was unblushing as I handed him one and replied: 'You're not saying "No" when it's free.'

Jackie grinned, and just as we began to discuss the possibility of a return home overland, the call came for us to board the aircraft once more. There was no time for us even to light our cigarettes. Jackie stuck the cigarette I had given him behind one ear, and we made our way to the waiting *Elizabethan*.

For the last time the engines revved up, and then we were roaring along the runway again. I thought I detected a change in the tone of the engine on my side, but I couldn't be sure. My eyes were glued to the window, watching that slush spray up as the wing wheel tore through the carpet of snow yet a third time. The rod from the underside of the wing to the wheel went up and down like a yo-yo on a string . . . but still there was no sign that the plane was becoming airborne.

Why I did it, I don't know; but I loosened my tie and unfastened my shirt neck. Then I slid my six-foot frame downwards in my seat and pressed my feet up against the back of the seat in front of me, which was occupied by Bill Foulkes. My mouth was dry, and I felt tense.

Bill Foulkes, too, seemed to have slid downwards in his seat – I could hardly see the back of his head now. It occurred to me that Bill was also bracing himself – for what?

Someone began to laugh, in an uneasy sort of way. Then I heard Johnny Berry say: 'It's no laugh – we're all going to be killed'.

I had the impression that the brakes were being applied, and as the plane began to slide, I thought: 'Here we go again'. Suddenly, there was a terrific smashing sound. Something hammered the top of my head and everything seemed to go black, as if darkness had fallen. I felt more objects strike my head as they sailed through the air.

Minute shafts of light appeared – then it was dark again. I felt that the whole crazy, bucking aircraft must be spinning round and doing cartwheels. The seat in front of me kept pressing against my outstretched legs, and I had to force them forward again. Still the terrible crashing, grinding noise went on . . . though I could hear not a whimper, not a murmur from anyone.

My thoughts were on death – stark, ugly death. I thought of the wife and baby girl I would never see again; of my parents and Ireland; and in a dazed, stupid sort of way I thought of

death in a strange land and – this was ridiculous – the fact that I couldn't even speak German.

When the grinding noise stopped, I thought I was dead. I was afraid to touch the top of my head because I felt that the objects which had hit it must have sheared off my scalp. As I plucked up courage to touch my face I felt warm, sticky blood. I reached down to unfasten my safety belt, and realised it just wasn't there.

Still doubting if I was in the land of the living, I rolled over – and saw a small shaft of light. As I crawled towards it, I could hear a hissing sound, but my mind couldn't connect it with the plane and the danger of fire from escaping fuel.

By now I was convinced that I was *the only one* alive in all this carnage. Eventually I managed to reach the ground outside the aircraft. Then I noticed that one of my shoes was missing. How it came off without ripping my foot off too, I shall never know.

I stood up and took in the scene. Pieces of aircraft were strewn all around, as far as the eye could see. What was left of one wing – there was an empty socket where the engine had been – was nearby. Small fires were starting to flare up near me as I swayed uncertainly near the shell of the plane.

Suddenly, round the nose of the aircraft, came the captain, James Thain. To attempt what he was doing took sheer, cold-blooded courage. He had a small fire extinguisher and was trying his best – ineffectively as it must be – to douse the fires which were spreading.

As Thain saw me he yelled: 'Get to hell out of here!' In the distance I heard other shouts for me to run, as the aircraft was about to explode. Thain's courage in trying to combat those fires was cold indeed – because he well knew the danger of an explosion. That had not occurred to me. Then I heard the cry of a baby – and I recalled the woman who had been carrying a child when she boarded the plane. As I looked round, I saw a small, white coat. It seemed limp and lifeless, and I felt afraid

to touch it in case the baby had been crushed and mutilated. But when I did pick up the coat, it was empty.

Again I heard the cry, coming from the inside of the plane – or what was left of it near me. I retraced my steps to the hole from which I had made my escape, and just inside, as I pulled frantically at the pile of rubble, I found the baby. I have no idea how it was protected in that terrible smash – but there didn't seem to be a mark on the infant.

As I picked up the child and prepared to crawl through the gap again, I heard a woman's voice. Suddenly, in front of me, another pile of rubble erupted. As the woman appeared, I helped her to get free. Her face was black – not with dirt, but with the impact of the crash – and one eye was badly cut. She was crying for her baby. . . .

By the time we were out of the wreckage, someone had arrived to help, and they took charge of the woman and child. I began to look around for anyone I might know.

I didn't have far to look. People who had been aboard the plane were now tearing wreckage apart as they desperately sought survivors. When I moved around the other side of the aircraft, I saw the tail. Fins pointing skywards, it was embedded in an almost demolished building about 100 yards away; and 50 yards beyond that was another building with its roof gaping.

Once more I focussed my attention on the area immediately near me. In the snow lay Dennis Viollet, his head gashed open. Near him lay what looked like the circular clutch plate of a car, only it was much bigger. I thought Dennis was dead.

Then I saw others, all of whom I took for dead, too. Jackie Blanchflower . . . lying in an unnatural position. His right arm seemed almost severed. When I went to him, he opened his eyes and said: 'I've broken my back, Harry'.

I was relieved to hear him speak – yet cautious about the extent of his injuries – and I replied: 'Don't be silly; you'll be all right'. He looked far from all right. The incongruous thing, as Jackie told me later, was that as he went into the operating

theatre at the Rechts der Isaar hospital, one of the doctors said to him: 'Ah, you smoke, eh?' They had found the cigarette I had given him just before take-off. It was still wedged behind his ear. . . .

With help, Jackie was made more comfortable on that desolate airstrip, and I bound my tie as tightly as possible round his injured arm to try to check the bleeding.

At intervals during all this time, I had been praying and crying, unashamedly. People who were there told me later they thought I had lost my reason.

I found Bill Foulkes with 'the boss', Mr Busby. The man who had built up such a great team was in a half-sitting position, supporting himself with his arms. He was moaning, softly: 'My legs, my legs'.

Everyone able to walk was helping in the business of making survivors as comfortable as possible, and then Bill Foulkes and I came across a van, into which we got Jackie Blanchflower and Johnny Berry. We set off for what I found out later was the Rechts Isaar hospital at Munich. That ride, with the vehicle skidding at speed in the snow, was frightening. Eventually a police car, its blue light revolving on the roof, caught us and passed us. So the traffic ahead was 'warned off' and we finally arrived safely at hospital.

There Bill and I met Bobby Charlton. A nurse took us to a room where – after we had made desperate efforts to indicate what we wanted – we were able to phone the British consulate and ask them to let our folk at home know we were safe. The next thing was to identify survivors. Bill identified Johnny Berry, I identified Ray Wood. And so the nightmare went on, with the doctors operating as we identified people. Eventually, Bobby Charlton fainted, and was given an injection.

When it was indicated that Bill and I should also be given sedative injections, I refused – my overpowering instinct was that I must get away from hospital.

The only moment when we came anywhere near to raising

a smile was when we were walking down a corridor with a Yugoslav who had been on the plane, and he suddenly decided that the doctors had better have a look at his leg. His intuition was right – it was fractured.

Neither Bill nor I slept that night in our room at a local hotel. We were filthy with dirt and grease, and our clothes looked as if they had been dragged through the gutter before we put them on. I lay on my bed and tried to think – and when morning came found that my back was so stiff I had to roll off the bed.

My nostrils had been split in the crash, and Bill suggested I should go back to the hospital to have some stitches put in. I wasn't too keen to return there, but the hotel manager lent me an overcoat and back I went. My head and face were X-Rayed, my back was massaged, and I was given injections. After each spell of massage and injection, the doctors asked, in sign language, if I felt better. After the fourth time, I felt anything was preferable to the agony I was undergoing. So when the chance came, I nodded my head firmly to indicate that my back was easier. Enough, I felt, was enough.

Back at the hotel, where by now our assistant manager, Jimmy Murphy, was installed, we were told it might be better if we stayed on over the week-end, in case any of the boys should ask for us. We agreed, though we didn't relish the prospect of visiting the hospital again.

When we did go back, I couldn't believe that Albert Scanlon had recovered so quickly. True, he still looked ill, but my last sight of him had been on the airstrip, where he had lain with his skull split open and blood gushing from the wound. Now he looked human again, even if he was swathed in bandages.

As we walked into Duncan Edwards' room, the big fellow turned his head and asked: 'What time's the kick-off on Saturday?' As if by telepathy, Jimmy Murphy, Bill and myself came up with the same answer: 'Usual time, three o'clock'. Sleepily Duncan murmured: 'Get stuck in'. Then he called for a nurse,

turned his head away, and drifted back to semi-consciousness. We left him, never dreaming that we should not see him alive again.

Meanwhile, the survivors' wives had been flown out from England. And I cannot praise these women – burdened with anxiety as they were – too highly. Despite – or, maybe, because of – their worries over their own menfolk, they all found the courage to comfort each other.

The days dragged by, and towards the following week-end Jimmy Murphy, Bill and myself left Munich. As we travelled on the train towards the Hook of Holland, my nerves – and Bill's – became more and more taut. Every time we felt the brakes being applied as we approached a stopping point, I wanted to scream. The memory of the crash – and that horrible skidding and slewing – was haunting me.

During the journey, Jimmy did his best to cheer us up – especially when the Chinaman entered our compartment. I have no idea what he was doing on a train crossing Europe, but there he was, seated opposite us. To try to coax a smile to our features, Jimmy asked the Chinaman if he had any sons who could play football. What with the Chinaman being unable to speak English and Jimmy's knowledge of Chinese being non-existent, the incident would have been good for a laugh any other time. But not then.

Finally we reached Dover, and Bill and I steeled ourselves all over again for the train journey to London. It was no use; five minutes after we had set off, the ticket collector appeared, and I asked him in desperation what the next stop was. I had every intention of getting off, wherever it was. My heart sank when the ticket collector informed us that we were express-bound for London. I felt that all hope for us had vanished.

While I sat there, wondering if I could stand the strain of this journey without losing my mind, the compartment door opened and a man spoke to me. In a vague sort of way I was aware he was asking if my name was Harry Gregg. I must have mumbled

'Yes', for I remember him expressing his sympathy about the crash. Then he disappeared.

Only later, when I had collected my senses, did I realise that he had told me his name. It was the same as mine. Because of that, he had said, he had always followed my career with interest.

So now, more than three years later, I offer my apologies to Mr Hubert Gregg, the actor, for the boorish way I behaved that day on the Dover-London train. Any other time I would have felt honoured and delighted to have been in his company; but that day, I can honestly say, I wasn't myself.

In London, a Daimler waited to take Billy and myself to meet our wives, who had travelled from Manchester. The same, sleek limousine took us on the journey north, and while Jimmy Murphy slept peacefully most of the way, Bill and I must have asked – no, ordered – the driver 50 times to ease his foot off the gas. We were still terrified of another crash.

So, if the driver of that car should read this, here's my second apology. I don't believe he ever drove at more than cruising speed on that trip; but to us it seemed as if at any moment we might become airborne.

As we drove through the English countryside, reflecting on our luck in having a future again, and trying to blot out the awful memories of Munich by thinking fixedly about football, I began to think what the future would mean for the club – and I realised what a task Jimmy Murphy had on his hands. I had gathered that when Jimmy saw Mr Busby in hospital, the boss had told him things must go on . . . and Jimmy, looking ahead, had uttered his thoughts aloud when he talked about the possibility of signing Ernie Taylor, then on Blackpool's transfer list.

As 'the boss' had said, things must go on; and the name of Ernie Taylor was the signal for a new start. From the ashes of the old Manchester United, a new team must be assembled.

Chapter Five

MY SUNDAY CONSCIENCE

SINCE Munich, I fly because I must; because my job as a footballer takes me to places thousands of miles from Manchester; and because flying is often the one means of ensuring that I can carry out my job.

I still hate that walk up the steps and into the aircraft. I hate even more that feeling of utter finality as I strap myself into my seat and wait for take-off. But I have managed to conquer that awful feeling that I am voluntarily going to my doom – although twice since Munich I have sweated with fear and yet felt clammy at the same time.

The first occasion was when I was chosen to play for Northern Ireland in the World Cup tournament in Sweden, just a few months after the crash. I could not face the prospect of an outward journey by air, and the Irish officials thoughtfully agreed to let me go by boat – but by the time the journey was drawing to a close, I had made up my mind that I must fly again.

I had made arrangements to return home by sea, but as the days passed I found myself weighing up the risks – and the safety – of flying back. It had become clear to me that if I hoped to continue a successful football career, at club and international level, the time would come when I must fly – or quit. Over breakfast, I made my decision. The tournament was over for us, the rest of the party were due to fly back next day. But I couldn't wait that long – it had to be now or never.

The Irish officials fixed up the plane booking – two of them travelled with me – and we had reached London before anyone realised I had broken the vow I made just after Munich . . .

that I would never fly again. Then my wife, who was in Ireland with my folks, was told of my trip, and when I stepped out of the plane at Belfast, she was waiting.

I confess that when the time came for me to board the aircraft in Stockholm for the first leg of the journey, I had to summon every ounce of will-power I possessed to avoid backing out. Indeed, had I postponed the effort, I might never have flown again . . . for 24 hours after I left, the rest of the Irish party departed – and ran into trouble.

Five minutes after take-off the captain of their aircraft had to tell them that the undercarriage would not retract, and for 15 agonising minutes they had flown around the airport to use up 200 gallons of fuel before landing again at Stockholm . . . an arrival awaited by mechanics, fire engines and ambulances, just in case. . . .

What made it worse for left-back Alf McMichael and Dick Keith, two members of the party, was that only the previous week they had spent three hours flying through a thunderstorm from Bucharest, where Newcastle had been playing, to Stockholm, where they joined us.

But after my safe arrival home, I knew I was glad that I had made the effort. The next time it would not be so harrowing. And so it proved. Indeed, on only one other occasion have I really been scared stiff; and that was last season, after the international against England in Belfast. This time Bobby Charlton, who had been on the opposite side, was there to share my fear.

Bobby and I had booked seats on the night plane back to Manchester, and when we boarded the aircraft, we found that almost every seat was occupied. So Bobby sat next to the gangway on one side of the plane, and I had the seat on the opposite side.

We strapped ourselves in, and the engines were revving up when Bobby, with a look of alarm on his face, almost broke his safety straps as he strained across the gangway to whisper hoarsely into my ear.

'Look what that bloke's doing!'

'That bloke' was a man sitting further up the aircraft, nearer the nose than ourselves. And he was tugging at the red emergency-exit handle above the window where he sat. I don't know if the man was a stranger to flying; maybe he felt the atmosphere was stifling and had some idea of introducing a breath of fresh air into the plane. But when I saw him tugging at that handle, I was as scared as Bobby at what might happen when we became airborne.

Hastily I looked around for the steward. He was nowhere in sight. Just as Bobby and I were wondering, panic-stricken, whether to go searching for him, he appeared from the captain's cabin. Casually he walked down the gangway, noting that every passenger's seat belt was securely fastened. In a frenzy of impatience, I waited until the steward was approaching us, then I motioned urgently.

Smiling, he leaned forward to find out what I wanted. A few, hurried whispers on my part and he was galvanised into action. Swiftly he returned to the captain's cabin, and then I heard the engines dying down. A few moments later, the captain himself appeared.

Smartly he went to the man who had been tugging at the window handle, and explained that it must be used only in case of emergency. Then, using all his strength, he tested the handle and the window. At last, apparently satisfied that the window would not be hurled into space the moment we became airborne – and, for all I know, the man with it – he made doubly sure that there would be no accident by asking the passenger to move to one of the few vacant seats.

I don't think Bobby Charlton or myself felt really happy again until we had touched down at Ringway. That was how the memories of Munich still affected us nearly three years later. . . .

For Manchester United, Munich had been the end of an era. In the days and weeks that followed the tragedy, those of us who had returned felt at times that we moved in a world peopled by

ghosts . . . the ghosts of those who had vanished from the scene.

In those early days, Bill Foulkes and myself began to realise the terrific job which Jimmy Murphy had on his hands. 'The boss' was still fighting for life itself in the hospital at Munich; so many players of that great United team had gone; and youngsters had to be drafted into the first team when they were barely ready for the baptism of First Division football.

New signings were a priority, of course. And the first was little Ernie Taylor, who had already earned Cup-winner's medals with Newcastle United and Blackpool. I don't think any of us foresaw that within a few months Ernie would go to Wembley yet again with the 'new' Manchester United.

The night we played Sheffield Wednesday in the fifth round of the Cup, we had another man in our ranks – Stan Crowther, from Aston Villa. Stan had starred against United at Wembley the previous year, when Villa lifted the Cup despite all that the gallant 'Red Devils' – a man short through injury – could do. I'm told that Jimmy Murphy had to put in some really persuasive talk before Stan decided to join United – indeed, the Villa wing-half signed for us only hours before the Cup-tie.

When we went out to do battle against Wednesday that night, we had Ernie Taylor, Stan Crowther, the fighting spirit of the core of youngsters in the team . . . and the will to win that 60,000 emotional spectators were waiting to instil into us. The match was played to the accompaniment of one great roar; Wednesday were fighting against the hopes of the crowd, as well as 11 opponents on the field. How could they have hoped to win?

The pre-Munich team had disposed of Workington and Derby County; the new boys saw off Sheffield Wednesday and then West Brom. And so we were through to meet Fulham in the semi-finals. They say there's no sentiment in football, but those weeks after Munich proved that for once the cynics were wrong. Manchester United carried the hopes of people throughout the

length and breadth of the country. And we staggered the football world by holding Fulham to a draw.

Between the semi-final and the replay, however, I received – among the dozens of letters from well-wishers – one little epistle which I wanted to forget. It didn't frighten me – I dismissed it as the work of someone not quite right in the head – but it terrified my wife.

The letter, signed by 'The Golden Lion Boys', threatened to 'do me in' unless I 'threw' in enough goals to make sure that Manchester United lost. I wasn't stupid enough to believe that any genuine football supporter – from Fulham or anywhere else – could have written such drivel. If anything, the letter only made me the more determined that Fulham would not beat us.

Once more fortune smiled on United, and we emerged from this battle as the winners. For the second year in succession the club had reached the golden goal of Wembley.

The week before the final, we went to Blackpool for a toning-up spell. It was felt that we needed a break – especially from the constant stream of ticket hunters who pestered us wherever we went at home. By this time Mr Busby was back and, though he still limped and needed a stick, he joined us at Blackpool. He had made a miraculous recovery, and was determined that if possible he would lead his team on to the field at Wembley. But I had begun to wonder if I would play there. . . .

Ever since the crash, I had suffered from violent, blinding headaches. No amount of sedatives could stop the terrible buzzing noise in my head, and in desperation, when I went to bed at night, I used to bind a tie as tightly as possible round my forehead, hoping somehow that this would deaden the pain. It helped, but not a lot, and when I went for an X-Ray there were fears that the blows I had received in the crash had fractured my skull. Fortunately, the X-Rays did not reveal a cracked skull, and as Cup Final day drew nearer the headaches became less intense.

But I had another problem on my mind, too. It was one which

had nagged for weeks without my being able to come to a decision over it. The plain fact was that I had been named as one of the Northern Ireland party to go to Sweden for the World Cup – and my conscience was playing me up.

Many people have since claimed that the Irish officials agreed to our entry into the World Cup tournament only because they believed in their hearts that the team would never get through the preliminaries – and that, therefore, there would never be any necessity for us to play on a Sunday . . . which was forbidden by the rules of the Irish Football Association.

When we did reach the final stages, it was obvious that we would be called upon to play football on a Sunday, and the controversy which this aroused throughout Northern Ireland was fantastic. Friends became enemies overnight because they could not agree about the rights and wrongs of the matter. And, having been brought up to go to church and believe Sunday should be a day of rest, I found myself wondering what my attitude should be.

Many folk – including people prominent in Irish football circles – expressed the view that Northern Ireland should withdraw. My own problem was simply whether I could play on a Sunday in competitive Soccer . . . and yet feel at ease with my conscience. In other words, should I voluntarily drop myself from the team and miss the greatest experience a player can have in the game?

I sought out Mr Busby at Blackpool and explained my dilemma. I pointed out that if I should drop myself from Northern Ireland's team, I must also be consistent and refuse to play on a Sunday for Manchester United, should the occasion ever arise. What, then, would United's attitude be towards me? – After all, they were the people who provided me with a living, week in, week out.

Mr Busby assured me that if I felt I could not play on a Sunday, United would not hold it against me. On the other hand, he did not feel qualified to advise me which decision to

make. We discovered that there was a clergyman in the hotel, and it was to him that I took my problem. Again I was unlucky, for the clergyman was a Roman Catholic and – quite rightly – he felt unable to advise me. But he did offer me a ray of hope.

He suggested I should make an appointment to see a local Church of England clergyman, so I went straight to the phone and rang the vicar whose name I had been given. Without preamble I told him my name and asked to see him urgently; without hesitation, he told me to go round straight away.

For more than half an hour we talked over the problem, and eventually we agreed that if I did play on a Sunday, I should not be committing any great sin which would appal me for the rest of my days. As I said at the start of this book, I go to church regularly; but I don't consider myself to be a better christian than anyone else. Yet I certainly did not go to all this trouble to sort out my problem just because I thought it would make Harry Gregg appear a holier-than-thou. I believe in God – and I did not want to feel that I had behaved contrary to the teaching and faith in which I had been brought up, and in which I believed.

So the week at Blackpool ended on a more cheerful note . . . and there was the promise of the Cup Final. In the event, I think the game turned out to be an anti-climax, after the stirring earlier rounds. In cold figures, Bolton won 2–0. The only thing which set people talking was an incident in which Bolton centre-forward Nat Lofthouse and myself figured. But more about that later.

After Wembley, there was no let-up from football. It was Sweden, here we come – and the battle for the World Cup began. Soon England and Scotland were on their way home, dejected and humbled; it was left to the 'poor relations' of British Soccer, Wales and Northern Ireland, to battle on.

Little Northern Ireland, in fact, earned undying glory by reaching the very last stages of the World Cup, and when we did return home, our prestige had never been higher throughout

the football world. Harry Gregg was a happy man, too, because fortune had smiled on him almost every time he kept goal.

When I came home from Sweden, there was just time to snatch a few brief weeks of rest, then it was back to Old Trafford again for training. And within a few months my name was hitting the headlines again. This time I *did* drop myself from the Irish team.

It was in October, 1958, when I was chosen to play for my country against Spain in Madrid. That meant another air trip – and any other time I would not have hesitated. But my wife was expecting our second child within a month or so, and I didn't want her to have the extra worry for my safety on her mind. I felt, too, that she had spent enough time alone that year, while I was on my Soccer travels around Europe.

Mavis made no effort to dissuade me from playing; I made up my own mind. If people wanted to say that I had become scared of flying again, that was their business. And if Northern Ireland decided that I had played my last game for them, that was my hard luck. As for the £50 international fee, it counted for nothing. And I mean that.

It was simply a matter of being one trip I would have to decline with thanks. I believed that my wife's peace of mind came first at a time like this. My decision did cost me my place for the following international – then I was back on the scene.

At club level, the big event was the transfer from Sheffield Wednesday to Manchester United of inside-forward Albert Quixall . . . for another world-record fee (this time £45,000). And apart from the argument whether any player was worth such a vast sum of money, the Old Trafford faithfuls debated hotly what would happen to Ernie Taylor, the 'old head' signed to balance the youth of the 'new' United after Munich.

No-one – Ernie Taylor least of all – disputed that Albert Quixall must go straight into the first team. But after a few weeks it was clear that Ernie's future might lie elsewhere, and eventually Sunderland stepped in to sign him.

I know it took a great deal of thought on Ernie's part before he left Old Trafford. I know, too, that the fans and the boys he left behind will always have a soft spot for the little genius in football boots. I believe Ernie would have been happy to play in United's third team – indeed, he said as much when Mr Busby signed Quixall; but when Sunderland came along, no doubt he felt that the future might hold more for him with them.

Stan Crowther, too, eventually moved on, to Chelsea. There were people who were only too ready to say that he had never really fitted in at Old Trafford, but though he might not have been everyone's cup of tea, I always thought Stan was a good man to have on your side. And I think he took on the toughest job of all with us, because he had to step straight into the boots of the legendary Duncan Edwards. Maybe after Stan's great Wembley display against United the previous year, many people expected a little too much from him when he signed for us . . . Indeed, when United began to struggle in the League, even our own fans began to criticise. After years of success, they probably found it hard to accept some failure.

The real answer for our run of failure was that only then were we beginning to feel the full effects of Munich. In the weeks and months immediately after the crash, every man-jack in the team – inspired by the emotions of the crowds and determined not to let the club down – had played beyond himself. How could any club expect to lose not only half a dozen first-team players, but several experienced reserves as well, and still keep on winning almost every honour in sight?

To the joy of many fans, Manchester United were no longer the all-conquering, cocky footballers who lorded it over other teams. As time went by, there was a reaction. The wave of sympathy began to turn to resentment, because United never seemed to be out of the headlines. People began to say they were sick of reading about the club, that United's name was always being rammed down their throats. Now we were cut down to size – human size.

As we became 'beatable', so the criticism mounted. When I played for Northern Ireland against Scotland and we lost, 4-0, most of the blame was laid at my door. At club level there was criticism of United's manager for his perseverance with certain players, and there were suggestions that Bobby Charlton and myself should be dropped. After a few weeks of it, I went to see 'the boss' and suggested that if I were dropped, the pressure might at least ease off a little. Mr Busby made it plain that he would drop me if he thought it necessary – and not before. I left it at that.

The fabulous Real Madrid team came to Manchester and gave us the father and mother of a hiding. From my reading of various reports, I felt that I was being blamed for every one of the six goals scored against us. But I wasn't the only one to suffer. 'The boss' was urged to make sweeping changes – involving myself, Bobby Charlton, Wilf McGuinness and Warren Bradley.

Before our return game against Real two weeks later, I saw Mr Busby again. When I referred to the possibility of dropping out of the team, he replied: 'Don't let me hear you talk like that again'. I didn't think I had been playing any better or any worse than anyone else, but I must admit the criticisms had been weighing heavily on me.

But in Madrid we caught the fabulous Spanish side at sixes and sevens – for the first time in my life I saw them as mortal footballers, instead of the supremely confident, nonchalant strollers of the past. We still lost, of course – but the margin was by the odd goal in 11 this time; and I felt that I had played well. We all knew we had given them a fight and a fright, come to that, and for once we had no inferiority complex. This, I thought, could be the turn of the tide for United. How wrong I was!

We went to Goodison Park for a League match against Everton – themselves having a hard time – and lost, 2-1. I got the hammer for having given away a penalty. Yet still I didn't think I had played too badly.

The following Saturday we were due to meet Blackpool, but the Thursday before the game Mr Busby sent for Charlton, McGuinness, Bradley and myself. He thought the time had come for us to have a rest – and he proposed to leave us out against Blackpool.

This bolt from the blue shocked me. I'll make no bones about it. In previous talks with 'the boss' I had been the one to talk of dropping out; now the blow had fallen. I spent a week-end of trial and torment, and got only one slight piece of satisfaction from the whole business. That was when people asked me if I were going to demand a transfer. I think they half expected me to go berserk! and they looked shocked and disappointed when I refused to say very much.

A month later I was still out of the team, and in a game against Burnley reserves I injured a finger. When I reached Old Trafford after this away game, I heard it whispered that I might expect promotion to the first team the following Monday night. Heartened, I went down to the ground on the Sunday morning and reported fit, as, indeed, I felt I was. To me, the injured finger was not enough to make a fuss about.

The next morning 'the boss' told me he thought it would be wiser if I didn't play that night. . . .

He referred to the Cup-tie we were due to play in a fortnight's time . . . and the disappointment inside me began to turn to anger. I didn't want to come back to the first team in such a vital game, knowing that one false move on my part could see me out again.

What was more, over the week-end I had seen David Gaskell – who had replaced me – on the treatment table, and I felt, rightly or wrongly, that an unfit Gaskell was being preferred to a fit Gregg for the match that Monday night. I was thoroughly worked up when I went to watch the game at Burnley that evening – but I had to admit that David played well. And this knowledge added fuel to the fire.

I felt the time had come for a straight talk with Mr Busby. I

wanted to know where I stood. As usual his door was wide open, and we had a heart-to-heart talk. When I left his office, I felt happier about some points, but was still dubious about others. Later that week a newspaperman asked me if I had been to see 'the boss'. I had to admit this was true, and the next thing that happened was newspaper talk that I might ask for a transfer.

The next first-team game – a week before the Cup-tie against Derby – was at Newcastle, and United were walloped, 7–3. As usual, United were going to Blackpool for the week before the Derby match, but as my wife and children were not well, I obtained permission to postpone travelling to Blackpool for a day.

Over the week-end, before I went, I discussed with my wife my position with the club. Despite the disappointment of the previous week, I decided that as soon as I reached Blackpool I would see 'the boss' and tell him that so far as I was concerned, the slate was wiped clean. So long as he wanted me, I was ready to stay at Old Trafford and take my chance.

Mr Busby was the first person I saw when I did arrive. But before I could ask him to spare a few minutes, he said *he* wanted to talk to me. We went to a private room, and secretly I wondered what on earth he was going to say. Did this mean I was finished at Old Trafford?

What worried me was that for once, 'the boss' wasn't smiling – he had a frown on his face, and that didn't augur well. Hardly had I begun to say my piece when he asked: 'Did you write me a letter over the week-end?'

I was bewildered; and then he showed me a typewritten note bearing the signature 'Harry Gregg'. With consternation I read the contents.

The note said that this was the official notification of my request for a transfer. I would be in Mr Busby's office on the Tuesday morning to confirm it. And would he please notify the Press of my intention?

Shocked, I said: 'I know nothing about this. And I thought

you knew me well enough to believe that if I'd anything to say, I'd come straight out with it, face to face'.

Mr Busby replied: 'That's what I hoped you'd say'. And for the first time during the interview he smiled. Apparently the letter had arrived during the week-end, and he had even considered coming to my home to find out what was on my mind.

When I realised that 'the boss' was relieved I hadn't sent the letter, a load was lifted off my mind. All my problems seemed to have vanished – I didn't care if he stuck me in the third team. I was glad he knew the truth – and that I was still wanted at Old Trafford. I was happiest of all because I had gone to see him with the intention of explaining how I felt. I would have hated Mr Busby to think I had waited until my first-team place was secure before I would admit to being happy again.

I was the happiest man in the world when I left that room after our chat. And my happiness was complete when my name kicked off the first team for the Cup-tie against Derby. We even won, 4-2. . . .

Chapter Six

UP FOR THE CUP-AND OUT FOR THE COUNT

IN his book *Going for Goal*,* Aston Villa's Irish international winger, Peter McParland, lists six players he would choose to have with him should he be cast on a desert island. Peter's list includes Danny Blanchflower, of course, for his eloquence and his commonsense – and Harry Gregg . . . who would be just the man to drive away the savages!

Am I such a wild man, especially on the football field? – Well, people are entitled to their opinion of me as a player. So they must make up their own minds. I admit that I've been cheered off grounds all over the country . . . and booed off the very next time I've played there.

I'm not making any sort of excuse when I say that *everything happens to me*. I don't go chasing headlines (as some people like to believe) . . . but, sure enough, sooner or later my name is splashed across the sporting pages of the newspapers, and I become the centre of a new controversy. It has always been that way.

I freely confess that sometimes the incidents which have sparked off the arguments have been my own fault – or, rather, the fault of my impulsive nature in the heat of the moment. At other times, I have been more sinned against than sinning; and yet on other occasions I have been the victim of circumstances. Such as the game between Doncaster Rovers and Bristol City. One reporter called it *The Case of The Drunken Goalkeeper*. I was the goalkeeper – of course.

* Published by Souvenir Press, London.

I dived for a ball near the post, and the woodwork stove in several of my ribs. As I was taken from the field to the dressing-room, I felt the pain searing right through my body, and I was gasping for breath. The club doctor examined me and prescribed an injection to ease the pain and act as a sedative. Then it was the hospital for me. But it didn't work out like that.

The next thing I knew was that I was alone in the dressing-room as manager Peter Doherty entered. And he said: 'Do you feel ready to go?' In a stupefied sort of way, I imagined he was referring to my going to hospital, and I answered: 'Yes'.

I felt as if I were burning all over – but I was blithely happy. I didn't really care what happened to me. And as I followed Peter out my body just didn't belong to me – it had the sensation of floating.

At the entrance to the pitch, Peter and I parted company . . . I carried on walking, back to my goal, where left-winger Ronnie Walker had taken over in my absence. When the mystified Ronnie saw me moving in, he moved out.

I want to make it clear that Peter Doherty had had no idea I was 'under the influence' when he walked into the dressing-room, and – from my answer to his question – he must have assumed that I was fit to return to the field.

But our trainer, Jack Hodgson, had been present when the doctor had given me the shot of morphia – he had told me I would be asleep within a few minutes – and when Jack saw my sudden appearance from the wings, he was horrified. So far as Jack was concerned, I was supposed to be on my way to hospital, not to goal.

Jack wasted no time; he raced round the edge of the field to meet me as I arrived back in goal, and tried to persuade me to leave the field again. In a ridiculous sort of way, I felt great. I brushed aside all Jack's entreaties, and insisted on staying. Jack stayed, too, chain-smoking. Every chance I got, I took a draw on his cigarette; every chance he got, he doused my face with cold water to stop me from going to sleep on my feet. And not until

the match was over did I go to hospital for treatment. It was no brave show I'd been putting on; it was simply that I had really not known what I was doing.

But that afternoon wasn't nearly so uncomfortable as the Good Friday game Doncaster played against Liverpool. *That* day I was knifed.

Liverpool were reckoned to be odds-on for promotion, and when our inside-forward, Alick Jeffrey, broke through and scored for us, the trouble began. The Liverpool players – and their big crowd of followers – claimed the goal was offside. The visiting fans really went to town in the way they showed their feelings, too.

The first incident was when a high ball came into our penalty area and Charlie Williams, our centre-half, went up to head it clear. When he reached the ground again, he stayed there – laid out like a log. I thought he was feigning injury, and dashed out of goal to tell him to cut out the clowning. Not until I got to him did I realise he was out cold . . . and the reason for his sudden lack of interest in the proceedings was obvious. Near him lay a British Railways salt cellar – a heavy, metal thing which must have made quite an impression on Charlie's skull. Someone in the crowd – it must have been an irate supporter – had thrown it.

We managed to bring Charlie round, and the missile was dumped into the back of my net. I had no idea then that things were going to get much more hectic before the final whistle blew.

The first indication of more trouble was when I went round the post to collect the ball for a goal-kick . . . and from the corner of my eye I saw a policeman lean over the wall separating the crowd from the playing area. I got a glimpse of the policeman's helmet vanishing – and then the policeman vanished over the wall, too!

I placed the ball for the goal-kick, figuring that it was not my business to chase after missing policemen, and walked back a few yards. Then I turned and began to run forward to take the kick –

and felt a sharp stab of pain in one knee. I was forced to stop, and when I looked down, I saw blood coming from a gash in my leg. On the ground nearby lay a British Railways table knife! Somebody had been collecting silver from the refreshment buffet before going to the game . . .

I called the referee over to tell him what had happened, and he promptly picked up the knife and threw it into the back of the net to keep the salt-cellar company. Then he told me to get on with the game as though nothing had happened. I was flabbergasted – and I don't mind telling you, I was somewhat aggrieved that the referee didn't seem to think more of the matter. However, I soon realised that if he had made a big scene about things, there might have been really ugly trouble.

As it was, before the whistle did blow to finish the match, there were two more British Railways knives lying in the back of the net, as well as the salt-cellar and the one that had hit me.

After the game I was advised by the police to make no comment to the Press about the incidents which had happened around my goal. The police feared that any accusations might inflame tempers . . . and we were playing the return game at Anfield on the Monday.

We had already somewhat shaken the Liverpool followers by beating their favourites 1-0, so I agreed with the police that it was better to let sleeping dogs lie.

If we had shaken Liverpool's promotion hopes by our unexpected victory on the Friday, we demolished their chances at Anfield on the Monday, for once again the unexpected happened and the under-dogs won. That day our inside-forward, Roy Brown, broke a wrist and was off the field for quite a while; when he did come back, with his wrist strapped up, we were still playing under a handicap, of course. But we managed to hang on to collect the points – and I am happy to say that that day the only missiles thrown were hard-boiled eggs.

At the end of the season I was travelling through Liverpool on my way to spend the summer in Ireland. I bought an evening

paper in the city, and smiled at the lament that Liverpool had missed the promotion boat . . . especially when the writer referred sorrowfully to the double defeat a few weeks earlier at the hands of little Doncaster. That, the writer said, had spelled the writing on the wall.

Whenever I think of those games, I remember Charlie Williams being felled by the salt-cellar. I often wonder whether it hit him as he was going up or coming down. . . .

Charlie, a coloured boy, was tough as they come. He was often the target from crowds for remarks about his colour, and many a centre-forward thought he could give Charlie a hammering – and get away with it. But the crowds could never rile Charlie . . . and centre-forwards found they received as good as they gave.

In fact, Charlie once gave me a rousing when he thought I was acting a bit soft. It happened during a game against Nottingham Forest when, in making a save, I dislocated a finger. Stung by the excruciating pain, I yelled out, and Charlie came tearing up, really alarmed. He probably thought I must have broken my neck, at least, to make such a fuss, because when I told him about my finger he just rapped back: 'Never mind that, get back in your goal!'

I was so shaken by his reply and his dismissal of my injury in such brief terms that I went back to my goal . . . and I stayed there, too. The trainer, who had spotted that something was wrong, raced round the track and when he reached me put my finger back in place. And the game was not held up, even for a second.

Yes, everything happens to me . . . even in a Wembley Cup Final. That was the day we met our Lancashire rivals and boggy-team, Bolton Wanderers, a few brief months after Munich.

Now, some people decry the hard sort of game that teams like Bolton and Wolves play. Not me; I say that football is a man's game – and you must take the knocks as they come. That's the way I've always played – but at Wembley against Bolton I was

the one who took the knocks. And for once, I admit, I didn't like it.

In the second half, a Bolton forward hit the ball towards goal. I made an attempt to push the ball over the bar, but it hit my hand and spun in the air, dropping just short of the bar. I had to twist round to grab the ball, and as I caught it I had a glimpse of a sea of faces while I was turned towards the packed terrace. The next thing I knew I was being liberally doused with water by trainer Jack Crompton.

Many times since that day I have been asked about the incident. Great play was made of the fact that after I went down, I lay writhing on the ground. Was I really in agony; or was I being restrained by my team-mates from getting up and swinging a punch at an opponent? – The truth is simply that I didn't even know what I was doing.

When I did regain my feet, I asked a team-mate: 'Who did it?' – For by then it was obvious to me that someone had collided with me. And I was told that the opponent involved was Bolton centre-forward Nat Lofthouse.

I admit freely that when I felt able to move again, I also felt angry. No doubt the referee was the man to say whether or not a foul had been committed against me. What I knew was that I had taken quite a battering – and the middle of the back isn't recognised as the normal place for a shoulder charge.

I believe that Lofthouse has been a great club-man and one of the best leaders who ever pulled on an England jersey. I'm also prepared to believe that off the field there isn't a more inoffensive fellow breathing. But that afternoon at Wembley, had I been given the ghost of a chance, I would have given Nat a taste of his own medicine. For I'd been hurt.

You cannot ignore human nature and an explosive Irish temper. I had an eye that was already beginning to blacken, and I had a sore back. I was like a bear with a sore back, too. Every time Lofthouse got the ball anywhere near my goal, I was dying for the chance to even the score. I've heard fans shout to me 'get

back into the cage' whenever I've come out of goal and ventured near the edge of the 18-yard box; at Wembley, for the first time in my life, I realised that the 18-yard line could be like the bars of a cage – and how I felt imprisoned by the white lines which marked the boundaries for me!

Nat never gave me the chance to even things up – we carried on a battle of words, instead. Afterwards, of course, I realised it was childish; but at the time anger overrode all other sentiments. I'm glad to be able to say that when the match was over – despite the fact that we had lost to two Lofthouse goals – I was ready to shake hands with Nat and forget . . . until the next time we met on a football field. Then, if anyone had been hurt, I would have taken a bet that it wouldn't have been yours truly who suffered.

Yes, that Wembley final was the one time I really felt sinned against. But before my detractors rush to point the finger of suspicion at me, let me confess, too, that there have been occasions when I was the sinner. And one of the incidents I have never stopped regretting happened at Ewood Park three seasons ago, the night we played Blackburn Rovers.

Until then, I'd always felt the Blackburn fans had a soft spot for me, for I'd been lucky in playing some of my best games against the Rovers in my Doncaster days.

But that night I really blotted my copy-book, so far as the Blackburn followers were concerned. In fact, last year, when we notched our first away victory of the season there, I still sensed the atmosphere of resentment which lingered from that previous encounter . . . an encounter in which, more than once, tempers had boiled over.

The funny thing was that I had kept out of trouble, although there had been many moments during the game when I felt justifiably annoyed. For those moments I blame a certain Blackburn player who took every opportunity to harass me – and often unfairly. I'm the first to say that football is a man's game, and I believe that any goalkeeper worth his salt should be pre-

pared to withstand a fair shoulder charge or other legitimate attentions from opposing forwards. That's the way I have always played – ready to take it, if the punishment is fair, however hard.

But this particular forward had been giving me quite a going-over in the style we usually associate with the Continentals. Every time Blackburn gained a corner kick, the forward did his best to impede me. Every time I tried to move out and jump for the cross-ball, there he was, backing into me and tugging at my jersey. And this continual, niggling gamesmanship – which no-one in the crowd appeared to have noticed – had its effect in the end. I determined that if the fellow tried once more to obstruct me, he would have to rip the jersey off my back to do it . . . and then it would be clear to even the most fervent Blackburn fan what had been going on.

Minutes before the end of the game, with United leading and Blackburn supporters voicing their disapproval of their team's opponents, a corner was given against us. The kick was taken, and as the Rovers battled to score my first chance to collect the ball came as it curled over, head high. I moved out of goal, intending to catch the ball – and as I tried to get both hands up to it, I felt my left arm impeded.

In that split-second, I knew I couldn't grab the ball, so I decided on the next-best thing – to punch it clear. Up went my right arm – the free one – and I hit the ball. My clenched fist, following through, hit something else, too, with a sickening crunch.

When I looked down, I was horrified; for there, stretched out cold, face downward in the gluey mud, was the idol of Blackburn, England right-winger Bryan Douglas. And as the Rovers' fans took in the scene, they howled for my blood. If ever a crowd wanted a player to be given marching orders, it was at Ewood Park that night. And the worst of it was that Bryan Douglas had never once committed any offence against me during the whole of the game. He certainly wasn't the man who had been tormenting me with the jersey-pulling business.

But the deed was done, and I heard poor Douglas gasping for breath. I began to be afraid that he would choke in that sea of mud, so I bent down and turned him over on his back. Then, as Blackburn's trainer sped across the field to attend to the injured player, I turned away.

This apparently cold-blooded action on my part incensed the crowd to even greater fury – but what more could I have done, once the Rovers' trainer was there to help Douglas recover?

Even so, the Ewood crowd have never forgotten – or forgiven – this apparent dastardly assault on their idol.

Whenever I think about that incident I bitterly regret what happened. Blackburn trainer Jack Weddle and I had words – angry words – on the field immediately after the crushing blow which laid Douglas out cold. There were further uncomplimentary exchanges before our manager, Mr Busby, came to the rescue after the match and smoothed things out as we were ready to get into the coach taking us back to Manchester.

So far as I was concerned, I felt as hurt, inwardly, by my action as Bryan Douglas felt shaken, physically, by the blow which stretched him out full length in the mud. And as I always believe in plain speaking, I here and now offer my apologies to Douglas – and the Blackburn supporters – for the part I played in the matter. I hope that when we meet in the future, Bryan Douglas will get used to the idea of speaking to me again.

Chapter Seven

DAY OF REVENGE

ANY goalkeeper who has the misfortune to let nine goals through in one match will know the feeling . . . black despair. The memory of such indignity and humiliation lives with you for a long time in your dreams. But sometimes – just occasionally – you are lucky enough to get your revenge. I was.

Even now, I can remember that 9-0 thrashing which an English League side handed out when I was a raw, impressionable youngster on the fringe of the big-time . . . and on the receiving end of the hiding. Every time I picked the ball out of the net that day, I felt as though I had suffered a personal insult. All I had left at the end of the match was hope – the hope that one day my turn to rejoice would come. And come it did, on a day in 1957. Five years later. . . .

England then had played 16 games, without losing once; 30 years had passed since they last went down to Northern Ireland; and you had to go back even further – to 1914 – for the date of an Irish victory on English soil.

That was at Middlesbrough; and it was the year the Irish went on to take the home-international championship for the first and only time.

When we lined up for the kick-off against England at Wembley in 1957, I don't suppose anyone but myself even gave a thought to the day in March, 1952, when nine goals whizzed into my net. And in my wildest dreams, even I couldn't foresee what the afternoon would bring.

This game ended with 11 Irishmen being hailed as heroes . . . and England's captain, Billy Wright, being the target for savage criticism by his fellow-countrymen, many of whom suggested in

the plainest possible language that it was time Wright made way for someone else – both as skipper and centre-half.

This, to me, was unfair treatment. Billy Wright – who, to my knowledge, has always been the first to provide a helping hand and a kindly word for youngsters undergoing the ordeal of their first international – had earned my admiration a long time before that fateful game. And I saw no reason to change my opinion of his ability after the final whistle had blown that afternoon. His ‘crime’ during the match was that he was partly responsible for conceding a penalty.

It happened this way, when the game was 33 minutes old . . . Billy Simpson got possession of the ball and managed to nod it over Wright’s head. Jimmy McIlroy fastened on to the ball, and raced clear. Wright gave chase, goalkeeper Eddie Hopkinson tried to foil McIlroy, too. But in their desperation to prevent a goal, the England pair between them brought McIlroy down.

Northern Ireland were awarded a penalty, and McIlroy took the spot-kick himself. His shot hit a post – but the luck of the English was right out. The ball hit ‘Hoppy’ and rebounded . . . over the line and into the net. Which made Ireland a goal up.

Fifty-seven minutes had ticked away when England scored the equaliser for which their supporters had been praying. Big, hustling Derek Kevan, of West Brom., intercepted a pass, beat several defenders and passed to A’Court. As Dick Keith went into the tackle, the England left-winger pushed the ball goalwards. And there I was, going through the motions again . . . picking the ball out of the net. How I hoped there wouldn’t be eight more to come!

Oh, the joy of it all eight minutes later. Peter McParland made a pass; Duncan Edwards, that giant of a footballer, got to the ball . . . and, for once, fiddled instead of acting decisively. And in stepped Sammy McCrory to plant his right foot behind the ball and score with a fine shot from all but 20 yards.

What a day for McCrory, a Third Division player who was 33 years old. What a day to make an international début!

After 73 minutes I could have cried with joy. For there was Billy Bingham making ground so quickly his feet seemed barely to touch the ground as he sped onwards towards the England goal. And when at last he unleashed the ball into the penalty area, there was Simpson on the spot – and completely unmarked – to nod the ball home past an agonised ‘Hoppy’.

The writing was on the wall for England then, but they weren’t quite finished. Six minutes later, we knew that a memorable victory was not yet ours.

The dangerous Kevan pushed a pass to Bryan Douglas, England’s diminutive right-winger, and the Blackburn player carried on the good work by providing a great chance for Edwards. Duncan, making amends for that earlier goal which we had scored, let fly a thunderbolt from 18 yards out, and I just had to give him best.

But the critical incident of the game was an early let-off for us. Roger Bryne (later to become my skipper at Old Trafford) lobbed the ball forward to Douglas, who headed it goalwards. I was well beaten – but the ball hit the cross-bar. That lucky escape turned the tide for us.

When the 90 minutes were up and the final whistle went, we knew we had gained a great victory. What a wonderful and frightening moment that was. Suddenly, it seemed as if every man-jack who had been watching this duel came from the old country. And everyone wanted to chair us off the field.

I felt myself being hoisted on to shoulders; being pummelled on the back; having both hands shaken at the same time. Despite my precarious position, *this* was the supreme moment; the moment of triumph against the most formidable adversary – and revenge, utter and complete, for those nine goals I had once let through.

Of course, the inquests raged. Of course, there were people who said we had been lucky to tarnish England’s record. England team-manager Walter Winterbottom said: ‘If ever there

was luck, the Irish had it today'. But he did have the good grace to admit that we had deserved some.

As Danny Blanchflower said: 'If this was luck, we sure had to work for it!'

We of the Irish team knew something else . . . that we had arrived, as a team. That the work begun at Wrexham three years earlier was starting to pay a dividend. We were a select group of players – and yet not so select. For we were pretty well the only ones available for Northern Ireland to choose. But there was so much more to our victory than luck.

Some wise man asked Peter Doherty – our guide, philosopher, friend, and inspiration – what he thought about this famous victory. And how we had accomplished the seemingly impossible. Peter reflected for a moment, then said: 'Keeping the players together, making them a happy family, and developing the team spirit – that's our secret'. And, with a twinkle in his eyes, he added: 'Of course, we showed some skill today, as well'.

Credit for that triumph – and for other great victories which set Northern Ireland on the road to world-wide football acclaim – must be shared, of course. As I have said, we were a team. But a team needs moulding. And in Doherty, skipper Danny Blanchflower, and trainer Gerry Morgan we had the right men for the job.

I have spoken in an earlier chapter about some of my brushes with Peter Doherty; I have admitted we did not always see eye to eye when we were at Doncaster. That does not detract one iota from my admiration for the way he takes his football. For here is a Soccer fanatic, a man dedicated to the game.

Doherty talks to big star and small-time player with the same voice. He is no respecter of reputations – only of ability. And if I pay myself one compliment about my football prowess, it is this – that I believe my outlook on the game is similar to Peter Doherty's. Neither of us likes to give in.

Peter instilled confidence into us during those formative years, internationally speaking. He made you feel that you were as

good as, if not better than, the opposition. Now, I have met and played with people who – like myself – have known the rough edge of Peter's tongue. Some of these people have been heard to say (in a quiet corner): 'I'd like to see *him* do some of the things he keeps on harping about'.

I can truthfully say I've been one of the lucky ones. For I played with him and under him, at club and international level. And I've *seen* him do all the things he asked others to do. I've seen him, in his last season as a player with Doncaster, come off the field after a match . . . his eyes glazed, the sweat seeping through his shirt after his exertions.

Doherty as a player was a genius with a difference. For while some switch on the magic for 10 minutes, then take a breather for the next 20, Doherty was doing his damndest to keep it up all the time. For him the game always lasted 90 minutes – and he played every moment as if his life depended on the result.

In Peter Doherty's last season as a player, he had alongside him on the wing a much younger man, Bert Tindill. The idea was that Peter would play his usual game at inside-forward, grafting between defence and attack; but if the strain began to get too much – and remember, Peter was about 40 – Bert would move inside to take over for a spell while Peter had a breather.

But Bert always used to say that this idea never worked out in practice. Every 15 minutes or so, he would suggest to Peter that they should switch. And Peter – gasping the words out between frothing lips – would reply: 'No, it's all right – stay on the wing; I can make it'. And 'the boss' never stopped.

This, indeed, is where I take issue with Jimmy McIlroy. Much as I respect the ability of this fine player, who has been one of the mainstays of the Irish team – and, of course, one of the shining lights of Burnley for so long – I was surprised and disappointed to read his views on what it takes to be a star.

Rightly he cites players like Puskas as being in the top class of Soccer artists. But I beg to differ with Bob Lord's favourite sub-

ject when he infers that it is not necessary – or, maybe, even desirable – to go all out for 90 minutes.

I don't deny that a minute of McIlroy magic can turn a game; I don't deny that he is a fine player, by any standards. But I do say that neither Jimmy nor anyone else – no matter how great – can afford to play for only a quarter of the game and do enough to win it.

This past season, for instance, due to injury and illness, Jimmy could not play full out in a few matches, and Burnley suffered as a consequence. Because McIlroy could not be the real McIlroy for 90 minutes . . . only for short periods. And this was not sufficient. I certainly cannot see Jimmy McIlroy setting out to play a game that way.

I should love to have a front-row seat at a discussion between Jimmy and Peter Doherty on this subject – especially when I recall what happened in a game at Mansfield, when Doherty was playing for a team of former stars.

At half-time, they were losing; and they hadn't been killing themselves with their exertions. Doherty excepted. But he still had enough breath left in him as they entered the dressing-room to speak words which gave those great names of football something to chew on. It was a verbal dressing-down which spared no-one's feelings.

'People have paid good money to watch us,' he declared. 'Now let's go out in the second-half and do our stuff. Otherwise, some of you don't be playing for this team again.'

I know that happened – because I was there. And I remember Doherty at Doncaster, too. Whenever the name of a famous player with another club cropped up, he would almost explode. The player concerned was noted for his uncanny ability to master a football. Doherty used to say: 'If the fellow wants to do tricks with a ball, he should go on the stage'. And to us – a homespun team, indeed – he would add: 'I wouldn't swap *one* of you for him'. Pointing a finger at his chest he would assert: 'All the ability in the world is no good unless you've got it *here* – *heart!*'

Peter kept Doncaster going on a shoestring budget; then he became manager of Bristol City. Eventually he and City parted company, and there were even suggestions later that he should be deposed as Northern Ireland's team manager. What utter rot! I don't know just what went wrong at Bristol. I do know that during a string of international defeats last season, Doherty was still the same fanatic about football. Nothing had changed.

I can say without fear of being contradicted that he still commanded the respect of his players; and the victories which other countries achieved against us cannot be blamed on Peter Doherty. The Irish defeats were the result of team failures on our part, plus some helpings of bad luck.

During that spell of gloom in the international sphere, I came in for some criticism myself after the game against England in Belfast. I believed I had had a pretty fair game – and I still consider that to be the case – but obviously my opinion was not shared by a so-called Irish supporter who sent me a vicious epistle about my performance.

Hiding behind the pseudonym of 'Disgruntled Supporter', the writer of the letter – which was date-lined Belfast – had this to say:

'After reading this week's papers we would like to know how much you received last Saturday *against England*. I hope if you are picked against the Germans that you will bend your back a little more, truthfully Harry you were woeful and you can do much better than this. At least you could make an attempt.'

The inference that I didn't try infuriated me. I have my faults, as I have freely admitted – but I could never be guilty of not trying. That, in my book, is the greatest crime of all.

And the discerning reader will probably realise that I would certainly run true to form if anyone ever had the nerve to say to my face that I might 'throw' a game. My first instinct would be to land a hefty punch on that person's jaw. My next move would be to haul him off to the manager's office and demand that the suggestion should be repeated in front of a witness.

It was significant that 'Disgruntled Supporter' hadn't got the guts to sign his real name . . . unlike the many Irish fans who wrote to me in tones which plainly showed they didn't agree with such a verdict as the one passed by 'Disgruntled'.

I felt that in the game at Windsor Park I had played no worse against England than the day we beat them at Wembley . . . the day I was acclaimed as one of Ireland's heroes.

All the same, I was rather upset by the criticism I received over the Belfast game, because I knew that 'the boss' – Mr Busby – had not seen it, and I hoped he wouldn't judge me too hastily. Later, of course, I realised that I had been misjudging 'the boss' even to think such a thing. But I had some reason to be grateful to Walter Winterbottom, the team manager of England, for coming to my support.

We happened to meet soon afterwards, and – without any prompting from me – he brought up the subject of that international.

This is the man who had to bear a large portion of the blame – from the point of view of adverse publicity – for England's failures in recent years. He knows how it feels to get the big stick.

When we met, he asked me: 'What have you been doing to the Press?' – And when I said 'Nothing, so far as I know', he continued: 'I cannot understand how you came to get such a slating. During the first half, especially, I was telling myself that you were going to have another of those days when nothing gets past you. We were making – and taking – chances; but your goal seemed as if it might just have been boarded up. I was surprised that some of the newspaper boys had a go at you'.

Such a verdict – coming from a man who obviously had no axe to grind – heartened me. And what made his remarks sound all the sweeter to my ears were his final words: 'I told Mr Busby what I thought about the show you put up, too'.

Every player knows when he's had a bad game – but I sometimes wonder (making allowances for a player's instinctive dis-

like of the fact being publicised) what you have to do to please the Press. I feel certain now, for instance, that I'm running bang into trouble – but I have to say it, just the same.

I will repeat the advice which 'the boss' gave me when I first joined United – that I must get used to the idea of being interviewed and photographed. *This*, as I realised later, was a conservative statement.

Nevertheless, Mr Busby's words went home. 'Always try to remember that the newspaper boys have a job to do. And always try to be helpful.' Which is something I have never forgotten. But there have been times when I have felt that the newspaper boys weren't playing the game by me.

Last season, for instance, when there was more than a hint that I should be dropped from Northern Ireland's team. And as an honest expression of opinion, that was fair enough. But I felt it was a bit thick when a sportswriter phoned one of my young club-mates, Jimmy Nicholson, who had just been awarded his first cap, and asked his opinion of my form – after having first consulted my manager. Presumably, Mr Busby's answer wasn't sufficient.

Jimmy gave it as his opinion that I was playing well – an opinion with which the sportswriter disagreed. My only argument is that the writer was in Ireland and, therefore, saw me play only a few times in a season.

I've often opened my mouth and – to use an Irishism – stepped in where angels fear to tread. But I reckon I've known my subject when I have aired my views. Not so a reporter who interviewed Jimmy Nicholson after he was chosen to play for Northern Ireland.

Jimmy, left-half with Manchester United, was chosen at centre-half for his country, then was switched to inside-left. The reporter asked – as he was perfectly justified in doing – how Jimmy felt about the move, considering he had always played at *Centre-half* . . .

Considering that this interview took place on the golf links

in front of several international footballers, I thought such a statement made the reporter look rather ridiculous. Especially when I thought how any football-minded kid in Britain could have set him straight.

I think it's reasonable to say that if you aren't familiar with your subject, you're far better off keeping quiet, rather than disclosing your ignorance in front of people who have specialised knowledge of the subject under discussion.

Yet again, the trouble with some writers is that they are *too* familiar with the game. So familiar, indeed, that they appear to hold it in contempt. And I detest the man whose job it is to report Soccer, yet discloses in a confiding manner that football really isn't his sport. If that is so, he shouldn't be a Soccer writer. Let him turn to cricket, golf or Rugby – whichever does interest him.

Sometimes I get the impression that a few Soccer writers couldn't care less about the game which, after all, provides them with a living, too. But no doubt the money is good and the trips abroad are fine. Sweet enough inducement for such writer to comment about a game, although their heart isn't in it.

And while I'm at it, how *can* a man watch a football match for something like 60 minutes, then dash off to a TV studio to tell the millions waiting with bated breath exactly what went on over the full 90 minutes?

There have been plenty of sportswriters I have always been pleased to greet . . . and one or two I've steered clear off. And if it will provide a little balm for aching souls, Manchester United must admit that they have reason to be grateful for the millions of words of free publicity which have appeared in newspapers about the club.

So much publicity, in fact, that people in other towns and cities have become cynical and heartily sickened of reading about United, have accused the sportswriters of looking at the game through red-tinted glasses.

Speaking from experience, I know that the plain fact is that

most of the reporters – the good ones, any way – are always ready to chase a story. If they get on the scent, heaven help you. But then, that's their job. And no-one can say Manchester United haven't been a happy hunting ground for stories. Cup-chasing teams, championship-chasing teams, Munich, record transfer fees, European Cup battles . . . all these things have provided headlines material for the men who write about the game.

To those fans whose own clubs rarely hit the headlines, I would say this: remember the actor who was asked if he didn't hate being mobbed by autograph-hunters . . . and the answer he gave: 'Boy when they *don't* want to know you – *that's* the time to worry'. Manchester United could probably supply the same answer.

Chapter Eight

THE UNDERDOGS

NONE of us realised it at the time, but Wednesday, March 31, 1954 – the day we played against Wales at Wrexham – was significant for Northern Ireland. And not just because I was making my first international appearance.

That day saw the start of Northern Ireland's build-up for the World Cup finals in Sweden four years later. Just scan through the team which played against Wales:

Gregg (Doncaster R.); Graham (Doncaster R.), McMichael (Newcastle U.); Blanchflower, D. (Aston Villa), Dickson (Arsenal), Peacock (Glasgow Celtic); Bingham (Sunderland), Blanchflower, J. (Manchester United), McAdams (Manchester C.), McIlroy (Burnley), McParland (Aston Villa).

Times change, of course – and players change clubs, too. I'm now with Manchester United; Len Graham is coaching at Stoke; Danny Blanchflower is with Spurs; and Billy Bingham joined Everton last season. While Bill Dickson had to quit soccer through injury and Jackie Blanchflower had his football career cut short by the Munich air crash.

But the team which lined up against the Welshmen at Wrexham formed a solid foundation for the building of a World Cup squad. If it doesn't sound too Irish (and if it does, I hope you'll forgive me), I might add that after the Welsh game I was dropped – Norman Uprichard, who had kept goal so many times for Northern Ireland, was back. By the time the World Cup came round, I was the man in possession once more – although Norman travelled to Sweden and played yet again for his country when I was out through injury. The Irish are loyal, right enough!

As time passed after the Wrexham international, Jackie Blanchflower had dropped back from the forward line to replace Bill Dickson at centre-half. And a real success he made of the job, too. To my mind, Jackie became the key man of the Irish team . . . and he was certainly the best centre-half I ever played behind.

Then the tragedy of Munich became a bitter personal tragedy for Jackie; and into the breach stepped Willie Cunningham. By that time, Dick Keith had joined Alf McMichael to form a full-back pairing of club-mates.

We could also call on that little human dynamo, Wilbur Cush, and Tommy Casey – both recognised as wing-halves – and they did us proud, whether in the middle line or in attack. As for Bill McAdams, he was unlucky enough to have a prolonged spell of injury which, I feel sure, cost him several caps.

But all in all, Northern Ireland had 16 to 20 players on whom to base their World Cup hopes. And when the time came, the so-called poor relations of British football did better than any of the more fancied national teams.

England and Scotland left Sweden ignominiously, their tails between their legs; Wales fared somewhat better; but Northern Ireland hogged the headlines and the glory.

After the notorious Battle of Belfast, the stage was set for the second clash with Italy for the honour of marching on to the World Cup finals. My Soccer career had undergone a remarkable change of fortune. I was now at Old Trafford . . . and my new club was in the thick of the fight for European Cup fame.

Manager Matt Busby had promised the Irish selectors that if Manchester United won their quarter-final clash against Red Star at Old Trafford, I would be released to play the next day for my country in the World Cup decider against Italy. We beat Red Star – and I left for home as soon as possible after the match. I had to be up soon next morning.

I was awake bright and early, all right – but the cold light of the dawn was not so bright. Outside, it was foggy. Oddly

enough, as my taxi stole cautiously through the murk towards Ringway airport – the plane was due to take off for Belfast soon after 6 a.m. – I never imagined that I might have serious trouble reaching my destination.

The danger signs loomed, however, when I found that all aircraft at Ringway were grounded until the fog lifted. Pressmen who were due to fly to Belfast to report the game against Italy fretted at the delay as much as I did – and they were even more upset when they learned that if anyone flew to Belfast that morning, Harry Gregg would have priority.

I gathered that one or two aircrew on the Irish run had managed to obtain tickets for the match, and I was assured that if there was the slightest chance of a plane – passenger or freight – I would be on it. Those boys were keen on their Soccer!

Lunch-time came, however, and still we were at Ringway. And when it became obvious that even the fastest jet couldn't make Belfast in time to get me to the match, I gave up. A newspaper photographer had a bright idea when he suggested taking me to his home to watch the match on TV. At least, I thought, I could watch my team-mates, even if I could not take part in the game myself.

The next morning I realised something else – that bright photographer had a minor scoop to himself . . . the pictures he had taken of me watching the match on TV were published in the newspaper for which he worked.

I had no reason to be upset, of course – I had every reason to be grateful for having been given the chance to see my team-mates beat the Italians. And the main thing was that we were now all set to do battle in Sweden against the world's footballing giants.

Three weeks after that victory over Italy came Munich. After that, all too short a time passed before we were due to take off for Sweden. I felt I could not face flying so soon after that terrible day in February; and the Irish selectors thoughtfully agreed that I could travel to Sweden by boat. My companion on the journey

was selector Joe Beckett, and I must say that the sea trip helped to ease the nightmare memories of the previous weeks.

On our way to Tylosand, near Halmstad – which was to be the Irish team's headquarters – we stayed a night in Copenhagen. Wonderful, wonderful Copenhagen . . . and our hotel was directly opposite the world-famous Tivoli Gardens.

That night I was awakened by the shattering noise of what sounded like an explosion. Dazed and rather fearful, I rushed to the window to see what new disaster could have befallen. Just then Joe Beckett came in. 'Hey, have they got the I.R.A. here, as well?' he demanded. To my relief, I realised that the explosion ~~was merely~~ the signal for a carnival to begin in the gardens. The locals were setting off fireworks to liven things up a bit.

Our first game in the World Cup was against Czechoslovakia. The scoreline shows we won by the only goal – but it doesn't tell the whole story.

However, if I might digress a little here, it is worth recalling that a lanky youngster named Derek Dougan made his début for Northern Ireland. He was still getting acclimatised to big-time Soccer, and didn't exactly set the town on fire. But what headlines he has made since!

Dougan, the man who put Blackburn Rovers into last year's Wembley final with two goals against Sheffield Wednesday. Dougan, the man who was a doubtful starter for the final itself until the last minutes. Dougan, the man who pulled a muscle in the first five minutes of the final against Wolves – and was accused by some Blackburn fans of not having broken sweat on the day of days.

And who else but Dougan could have timed a transfer request with such telling effect? – Just before he stepped out on the Wembley turf, he stepped out to the post-box . . . to pop into it his written request for a move. When he returned to Blackburn after the final, Rovers' fans – with the bitterness of defeat in their hearts – booed him and gave him the cold shoulder.

Yes, many a time Dougan has shown a flair for the dramatic – even the theatrical – touch . . .

Last season I had occasion to remember the big fellow, when my own manager sent for me. At that time Mr Busby was scouring the country for a man to add scoring punch to the United attack, and to my surprise he asked my views on Dougan. I realise now that I shouldn't have been surprised – 'the boss' isn't the sort of man to consider it beneath his dignity to ask a professional footballer for his opinion.

Later, from newspaper reports, I gathered there had been the possibility of a deal with Blackburn for the mercurial Irishman, but in the end nothing materialised.

My answer to 'the boss' about Dougan was one I have had no reason to change, for the simple fact is that I respected Dougan's ability as a footballer and believed Mr Busby could have handled a player who had gained something of a reputation – a reputation of being a law unto himself.

People are apt to moan that the game these days is shorn of personalities. And I don't dismiss this complaint. Yet here is a player who has been criticised to high heaven . . . because he jumps for joy when he scores a goal, because he does the unexpected, because he is unorthodox.

Dougan has been 'panned' unmercifully more than once for his so-called clowning on the field. Yet, as I have said, I believe he is a fine footballer – considerably better now than the day he first wore the green jersey. I won't say he hasn't courted the headlines. But I believe he is one of a fast-vanishing race . . . the footballer who is also an entertainer.

He has his gimmicks; and I think that at times he overplays his hand. But – as I told 'the boss' – I thought he would have proved his worth at Old Trafford.

As I told Mr Busby, I believed he would have had no difficulty with a player some folk claimed could be hard to handle. I honestly think Dougan would have proved a real asset . . . without kicking over the traces or arousing the ire of the fans – at

Old Trafford or elsewhere. Now the moment has passed. So let's get back to the game against the Czechs.

Before we tackled them, the team I feared most in our group was Argentina. From all that I had read and heard, their footballing ability was considerable; and I had a feeling of apprehension, because I reckoned they might prove to know a little too much for us. My suspicions were well founded, in the event, though I believe we contributed towards our own fall from grace. How that came about I'll tell you later.

Right now I'll say that we soon found out the mettle of the Czechs – so much so that I forgot to worry about the boys from the Argentine. Indeed, after 90 minutes of all-out football, I had worked up a healthy respect for the team from behind the Iron Curtain.

Once during the game I had occasion to thank my stars when Dvorak – who had twice missed scoring when well placed – forced a corner. When I raced out, anticipating being able to catch the ball, I missed it completely. Horror-stricken, I turned, heart in mouth, to see the ball scrape past a post . . . on the outside. I breathed again.

Our own goal came from a dazzling move. Jimmy McIlroy collected a clearance, brought the ball under control with one deft movement, and dummied to go down the right.

Suddenly Jimmy swivelled, and swept the ball across-field to left-winger Peter McParland, who put in a centre, low and hard, right on the line. In raced that mighty midget, Wilbur Cush, and before bewildered goalkeeper Dolejsi could grasp what was happening, the little Irishman had headed the ball past the Czech.

This was the only goal of the game, though That Man Dougan almost had his moment of glory when Cush sent him away with a finely-judged pass. Dougan got his foot to the ball and fired in a tremendous drive which had the fans – and the Czechs – gasping . . . until it flashed just wide of the upright.

That day Northern Ireland were the only British team to record a victory. And much of the credit must go to the defence,

in which Bertie Peacock was magnificent. They made sure we didn't lose our narrow advantage.

Little did we dream, as we trooped off the field – happy to have scored one success in the world's greatest Soccer competition – that before we packed for home we would have to meet the Czechs yet again . . . in a play-off for a place in the semi-finals.

And now to the game against the Argentine. The team which, as I said, I feared above all. They beat us, all right – but I still believe the result could have been oh, so different had we not altered our tactics. We were leading, 1-0, and doing well. Then the tide turned. Not because the Argentine players suddenly switched on a dazzling brand of football to which we had no answer; but because we tried to play them at their own game – and came unstuck.

Initially, we had played the game we knew best. We chased for every ball, we tackled hard, but fairly; and we were coming off best as our snap-tackling upset these footballers from Latin America.

I began to think that Danny Blanchflower – playing in his 32nd international, a record – would really have something to celebrate. There we were, a goal up after five minutes. A swift back-heel from Danny to Billy Bingham, a perfect centre which arched over to Peter McParland – and the ball was nestling in the net. Peter's head had made contact perfectly. *This* was the stuff to set Irish eyes smiling.

But as the first half wore on, I detected a change from my vantage point. Instead of keeping the ball moving forward, our boys began square-passing. Eventually it seemed clear to me that the Irish players were standing off the Argentine players, and trying to anticipate their moves, too. My team-mates seemed to have forgotten about going in quickly to win the ball.

Now they were jockeying for position, trying to work out where the Argentine players' passes would go – and to cut them off. This was playing into our opponents' hand. This was Soccer suicide. For the Latins, who had previously been hesitant and

fearful of our snap-tackling, were now coming up against tactics they recognised . . . and at which they were the more adept. They set out to show us how this type of game should be played – and they came off best.

We were unlucky, too. For instance, just before half-time, when the ball touched Dick Keith's hand. A pure accident – but it happened in the penalty area. And Argentina were on level terms when right-winger Corbetta slammed the ball past me from the spot. From then on we were up against it.

Inside-right Avio began to give me more than my share of work to do; inside-left Labruna was by now taking a much more active interest in the proceedings, too. And from a precision pass by Avio, centre-forward Menendez put Argentina ahead. The writing was on the wall, and five minutes later our opponents were two goals in front when left-winger Boggio headed the ball into our net.

I won't attempt to deny that I made mistakes, too, in that match. But I still believe that a change in tactics by the Irish team set us on the slippery slope to defeat. The Argentine players rounded off their day out by taking the mickey out of us.

So we were really up against it when we took on West Germany, the team which had won the World Cup last time out. They still had some members of that fine side, and a new personality in centre-forward Uwe Seeler, of Hamburg. Yes, the same Seeler who played such havoc with Burnley's defence in last season's ill-fated European Cup venture. At the time we played the Germans, it seemed certain this was a match we must win if we were to keep our World Cup hopes alive.

Of course, we were the under-dogs. This was no new experience. In fact, before the tournament began, we had been 33-1 outsiders, and while we had gained many supporters by our fighting displays, we were still not really fancied to progress much further.

The game against the Germans was a humdinger. Any fan would have been happy to pay the price of admission. There

were all the thrills and spills of a Wembley final . . . but with so much more at stake.

In the first few minutes of the match I came a cropper. I went over on an ankle, and felt the pain sear up my leg. I had visions of being carried off, but fortunately the pain eased a little and I was able to carry on. Tommy Casey was injured during the game, too, and both of us finished up by going to hospital for treatment . . . once the match was over.

I caused a minor sensation that day – twice over – by going out of the penalty area to take on Seeler in a heading duel. Each time, as the German chased a long ball, I went out to race him for possession. I saw no sense in waiting inside my ‘pen’ while he brought the ball under control, with all the time in the world to slip it past me and into the net. So . . . I beat Seeler to the punch, as it were, and nodded the ball over *his* head. And I didn’t even stop to take off my cap!

This was something novel for the fans – the goalkeeper venturing upfield and leaving his goal completely unprotected. But this wasn’t the first time I’d chanced my arm – or, should I say, head? – In fact, it’s a ‘bad’ habit I’ve kept up – right from the day I was solemnly warned against standing on the 18-yard line while my team-mates were trying to bust the net at the other end of the field.

The warning came – and it was well meant – from an Irish selector. He said: ‘Harry, for your own sake, forget this business of standing on the 18-yard line. If you don’t, they’ll never pick you for Northern Ireland again’. This was one piece of advice I felt justified in leaving unheeded, however.

I’m still doing the same old thing in games today. My only consolation is that I’ve been chosen to play for Northern Ireland many times since that warning.

But to get back to the game once more. The Germans had the first big chance to do some damage when Rahn broke through in midfield and fired in a vicious shot which only just went wide. We struck the first real blow, however, when Peter

McParland rounded off a fine run and centre by Billy Bingham by driving the ball hard and low into the Germans' net.

Our joy was short-lived, though. Almost from the restart, danger-man Rahn swept through the Irish defence and, as I came out to narrow the angle, he smashed the ball past me and into the net. We were not out of the game yet, however, and Peter McParland turned on the scoring act once more, after Wilbur Cush had taken a corner. And it took the Germans until 10 minutes from the final whistle to equalise for a second time. Then it was Seeler getting into the act.

As those last hectic minutes ticked away, the Germans kicked the ball almost anywhere in the desperate efforts to hang on for a draw. Two minutes from time, Schaeffer was so hard-pressed that he booted the ball right out of the ground.

We felt disappointed with the result when the whistle did go. Our efforts had been in vain; now, we knew, we must pack for home. But not so. The Czechs (after losing to us) had whipped Argentina (our conquerors) and so there would have to be a play-off between Northern Ireland and the boys from behind the 'Curtain'.

Tommy Casey and I were ruled out straight away. Tommy's leg injury (a nasty gash) required stitches and my ankle injury (the doctors had diagnosed torn ligaments) made certain of that. Other Irish players were nursing wounds, too.

I did have the satisfaction of recording the fact that Northern Ireland won this play-off, though – in a broadcast home. It was a pure accident that I got on the air; simply that as I was walking up the steps of the stand towards my seat Ronald Rosser, the man who was doing the match commentary for Northern Ireland, hailed me and said: 'Look, I'm on my own here; why not keep me company?'

So I sat down next to him – and suddenly, as the match progressed, Ronald mentioned quickly that I was beside him, then thrust the microphone into my hands after telling his listeners: 'Now over to Harry for his views on the game'.

I hadn't time to be nervous. And there was no point in arguing about the matter when every word I said would go out over the air. So I did my best – I began to go hot and cold only when it was all over and I had time to reflect – and I'm glad to say that at least one person understood my gibberish. That was my wife, who was listening to the broadcast. She got the shock of her life when I began to speak.

Two goals from the irrepressible Peter McParland – scoring was becoming a habit he didn't like to break! – settled the hash of the Czechs. But Norman Uprichard couldn't call it *his* day . . . he broke a bone in his hand. So here was yet another Irish casualty. In fact, by the time we played France for the honour of reaching the semi-finals, some of us looked more like cripples than footballers.

Everything in football seems to be matter of opinion. And there are some folk who blame our defeat by France on the amount of travelling we had to do immediately before the game. For what it is worth, I offer my own view – that this was far from being the whole story of our dismissal from the World Cup.

The plain fact was that injuries collected by our players in their previous matches took their toll in the game against France. In fact, I rated the French team – despite the individual brilliance of Fontaine, Kopa and Piantoni – as slightly inferior to those we had already met.

No, we might have been tired – but it would have taken much more than the mere fatigue of travelling to make us lose our spirit. We had enough 'crocks' on the field that day to give us ample excuse for losing 4-0. Even worse, we suffered a bitter blow before the game when Bertie Peacock, the boy from my home town of Coleraine, was declared unfit to play.

Carried off during the game against the Czechs, he insisted on coming back to the fray. Now, against France, the left-half who had been the shining star in our World Cup jousts was sorely missed. Throughout the series, he had seldom put a foot wrong.

So the game ended the hopes of Northern Ireland. But if we had finally lost out against the glittering array of talent which the bigger footballing nations of the world had been able to amass against us, we had won honour and prestige. The name of Northern Ireland was firmly established on the football map of the world.

Not only that, but when a Swedish newspaper decided to name a World Cup team of World Cup stars, it chose three players from the ranks of the Irish. Here is the team:

Gregg (Northern Ireland); D. Santos (Brazil), N. Santos (Brazil); Blanchflower (Northern Ireland), Gustavsson (Sweden), Irlando (Brazil); Garrincha (Brazil), Fontaine (France), Kopa (France), Pele (Brazil), McParland (Northern Ireland).

What a magnificent tribute to the men from the little country! A far better tribute than the one I heard paid to me by people whom I considered should have known better. It was said that the headlines I gained in Sweden came as much from sympathy over the Munich crash as from any feats of skill on my part. Such talk did nothing but sicken and disgust me.

I have been called many names and been accused of many things in my time. But never, never have I tried to gain sympathy or praise in any degree out of what happened on that airstrip in Germany.

The reader can reflect and draw his own conclusions. To the people who really believe I go looking for headlines at any cost, let me say this: when you're on the football field trying to stop the opposing forwards thumping the ball past you into the net, you don't have *the time* to think about the glory you will earn by making saves look spectacular or impossible.

Sure, if you deliberately set out to catch the eye and make an impression, you'll succeed, all right . . . by becoming the target for jeers as you walk to pick the ball out of the net. It takes a split-second decision to save a goal; and to do it you've got to have your eye on the ball, not tomorrow's headlines . . .

Chapter Nine

PEOPLE AND PLACES

IN the television-quiz game 'Take Your Pick', contestants stand to win a handsome prize or (if your luck is out) something which is virtually worthless. Now and again, the contestant finds that a prize which appeared to be disappointing turns out to be well worth having.

For instance, the man who thinks he has won a pound of butter may find, to his surprise and delight, that he is being flown to New Zealand to collect it. And off he goes, on a free passport to a journey which will yield him memories to last a lifetime. Football can be like that.

To the youngster who once tried to sneak into Coleraine's Showground without paying the price of admission, the city of Belfast – 60-odd miles away – was impressive.

To the impressionable teenager who stepped off the boat at Liverpool and took a train to Doncaster, another world was opening up.

And to the young man who eventually stepped off the train at Manchester's London Road Station a few hours before making his début for United, the horizons were becoming ever wider.

In my boyhood, my idol was a goalkeeper called Johnny Thompson, who played for Glasgow Celtic and Scotland. Yet he was a man I never met, because he died before I was born. In fact, his death was the result of an injury he received in one of the 'Old Firm' matches – Celtic v. Rangers. But I grew up with the Johnny Thompson legend – to me, this man I never knew was the world's greatest goalie, and his name possessed an almost magical quality.

As a boy, you identify yourself with some famous sportsman

when you are playing a game. If it's cricket, you are a Peter May or a Freddie Trueman, depending upon whether you are batting or bowling. If it's football, you're a Di Stefano or a Puskas.

At football, I was always Johnny Thompson . . . the goalkeeper I had never seen. But I had heard so many stories of his skill that in my heart he reigned supreme as the greatest ever.

As I grew older, his name gradually figured less and less in my thoughts, although – as you can see – I never quite forgot him. But in time I came to realise that you can be only yourself, whether that's for good or bad.

By the time I had travelled from Coleraine to Doncaster and ~~on to~~ Old Trafford, I realised, too, just what I had let myself in for by choosing to become a professional footballer. A lot of hard work? – Well, I cannot claim that is so, for Soccer to me has always been pleasure. Heartaches? – Yes . . . and, of course, the prospect of having to carve out a new career at the age of 35 or so.

Is Soccer so bad? – Of course not; for if I *hadn't* chosen to become a professional footballer, I would still have been in Coleraine, joinering day in, day out. And I would have missed so much.

People . . . and places. I've been privileged to meet the famous and to travel half the world on a free ticket. Holland, Belgium, France, Switzerland, Germany, Spain, Portugal, Italy, Norway, Denmark, Sweden, Yugoslavia, the U.S., Canada – even Monaco – I've seen them all. And for that I have to thank football.

How can I ever forget Rome? – That was the place where I walked into a shop one day after we had played against Italy. I was in search of a pair of light-weight Continental boots. I found what I was looking for, but when I offered payment the shopkeeper brushed such talk aside. 'No, Signor Gregg – please take them, with my compliments.' I felt embarrassed . . . and yet pleased. I accepted the gift as graciously as I knew how; and I shall never forget the generosity of that shopkeeper.

Then there was Milan, and the European Cup semi-final

shortly after Munich. Almost as much as the game itself, which we lost 4-1, I remember the coach ride to San Siro stadium. The driver, with typical Continental élan, leaned out of his window all the way to the ground . . . discussing with the milling throng of football-crazy fans just how Milano were going to fare that night. I was amazed that no-one was run over.

As we reached the stadium itself, there was a hum of expectancy in the air. You could sense that this game meant so much to the Italian fans . . . and the knowledge that we were to go out and play before something like 120,000 fanatical supporters – of the opposition – made me feel like we were 11 men about to be thrown to the lions. But we survived . . .

Travel with me on the magic carpet to another world – the world of the almighty dollar. In the U.S., I reckon we met more Irish and Scots than Americans. One team we played on our tour last close-season contained five Germans, four Hungarians, and two Irishmen. And the cameramen behind the goal constantly expressed amazement that the players could keep up such a pace for 90 minutes in a heatwave.

Then there was St. Louis, where we attended a banquet and got a fright. Opposite me was a man who told us all about the dangers of a tornado. 'All goes deathly quiet,' he said. 'But when that twister comes – start running!'

The very next evening we were playing a match – and suddenly, lumps (and I mean lumps) of rain began to hit the ground. Just as suddenly, the crowd started to run. Uncertain and rather fearful, I turned to a team-mate and said: 'It's a whirlwind'. Before I could say another word he'd left me standing. By the time he had reached the trainer's bench, however, he realised that it wasn't a 'twister' – just the rain which had made all the spectators dash for shelter.

The next day we had another scare, as we were sunbathing at the hotel's swim-pool. Full-back Tommy Heron, wearing only a pair of red shorts, was writing at a table. As he turned to make a remark to someone, a heavy swirl of wind whipped table

and sun-umbrella away and high over a wall into the adjoining car park. Tommy didn't wait to be blown away himself – he grabbed his belongings and raced for the shelter of the hotel.

The Americans are brash, self-confident – and often likeable. Sometimes they seem almost impossible. The Irish are supposed to be a crazy race; you could say that goes double – for the Americans.

When we docked in New York after our trip aboard the Queen Elizabeth, it took us about two hours to get through the customs. I stood behind a passenger who carried a little black bag, and watched dumbfounded as he emptied it in front of the customs officers. Out rolled a pile of pebbles which the passenger declared were for birds. Don't ask me how or why.

That customs officer was a hard case, though. He took a hammer and a knife and began trying to split those pebbles – maybe he was looking for illicit diamonds. But after half an hour – when he had split four pebbles and hurt his hand – he gave up.

One old lady who couldn't find the key for a cabin trunk presented no difficulty. A burly docker split the trunk open with a crowbar.

Our inside-forward, Albert Quixall, really got the 'big deal' from the cops patrolling near the gangway. Maybe they knew Albert had cost United £45,000, maybe they didn't; but they certainly gave him the treatment. They shook his hand, using expressions like 'Champ, it's great to see you', and gave him a hero's welcome. You'd have thought he was a heavy-weight boxer returning home after winning a world title. And 'the champ' got the same treatment all the way across the country.

Coney Island was an eye-opener. All over the place there were beach notices eight feet high, with the word 'NO' in lettering six feet high. Underneath came the list of 'don'ts' . . . NO smoking, drinking, digging, playing baseball, making sand castles on the beach.

Maurice Setters and I walked along the broadwalk one day

– slap into trouble. It was more than warm, and Maurice, who wore an open shirt, slacks and sandals, slipped off his shirt to feel cooler. Up strolled a cop, gun slung low at his hip. ‘Hiya,’ he drawled. ‘You know you just won yourself a 25-dollar fine?’

We caught on quick. Ahead of us was yet another notice . . . NO sunbathing on the broadwalk. Luckily, we talked ourselves out of that one.

In Los Angeles I nearly got drowned. The hotel (as usual) had its own swim-pool, but you weren’t allowed in unless the lifeguard was on duty. Eventually, one day, we were able to enter the water, and someone kicked a ball in the pool – which was the signal for Alex Dawson to go after it. He waded through the water until he suddenly realised he was in the deep end.

I saw him thrashing the water, and – as there seemed to be no sign of the lifeguard – decided to act. I didn’t want my head kicked in, so I reckoned that the way to go about it was to dive under Alex and get my hands under his feet, levering him upwards. Suddenly I felt his legs wrap themselves around my neck.

Joe Carolan (now with Brighton) had also seen the plight Alex was in; and – not realising I was already under the beefy centre-forward – had jumped to the rescue. My lungs strained to bursting point as I tried to free myself from the grip of Alex’s legs. Eventually, as I was starting to have visions of being the person who drowned, I got loose, and Joe, Alex and myself reached the safety of the side. Of the lifeguard there was still no sign.

It was in Toronto that I met a cousin who had emigrated about 10 years earlier. It seemed impossible that he could have shot up so – now he was taller than myself. He’d grown, all right – he was 6 ft. 4 in. tall. It was in Toronto, too, that I met people I had gone to school with as a boy. And in that city, more people than I had dreamed possible phoned ‘the boss’ and asked if they could have a word with me. To hear them talk, it seemed all of them were responsible for having taught me how to keep goal!

Yes, I’ve seen some places and met some characters during my

footballing life. And one of the greatest characters of all was Gerry Morgan, trainer to the international team. Gerry is dead now; but not one of the lads who came under his spell will forget him. To us he was 'Uncle'.

This fabulous fellow took every one of the Irish players under his wing; he played jokes on us all – and he was the target for practical jokes, too. But never, never did he get ruffled. And always he had an answer. Such as the time we played in Italy . . . and what a scorcher it was!

Gerry was not one whit put out by the heat, and devised a means of keeping the boys refreshed, as much as possible, during the game. Down by the touchline he had a pail full of water, and dozens of wads of cotton wool. Every time an Irish player was near him, Gerry would dip into the pail and fish out one of the soaking wads of cotton wool. The grateful player was able to moisten his parched lips.

The Italians were astounded at Gerry's actions. They wondered what on earth he was doing, and after the match someone was bold enough to inquire. In a conspiratorial manner, Gerry whispered: 'Well, I don't know whether I should tell you – but it's a special preparation for keeping the boys going'.

Pressed as to the ingredients of this magical formula, Gerry gravely replied: 'Two parts methylated spirits to one part soap'.

In Portugal, where we played under floodlights, Gerry stole the scene just before the kick-off. Suddenly, the lights were switched on at full power, and a fanfare of music sounded in honour of some important visiting personage. Gerry took it upon himself to bow to every part of the field from the touchline.

He had an answer, too, for the man who asked him how the Irish team would fare. 'We're going to equalise before they score,' he replied.

Tommy Casey will remember that match well enough – for during it I offered him my jersey . . . and the goalkeeper's job with it.

Portugal were awarded a corner, and as the ball came across

I went out to catch it, high up. But as I lifted my head to follow the flight of the ball, I was dazzled by the lights, and the best I could do was palm the ball down – straight to the feet of an onrushing forward. Gratefully he accepted the chance to slam the ball into the net.

So we were one goal down. But not a word was said to me by any of my team-mates . . . until a few minutes later, when Portugal were awarded another corner. Remembering what had happened the last time, I appealed for two of my defenders to cover the goal line if I had to go out again to catch the ball. 'I can't see so well under these lights,' I explained quickly, as the winger prepared to take the kick.

Tommy Casey – we were two of a kind – said out of the corner of his mouth: 'You're the only one who can't see'. And, as he had known, I reacted.

'Stop yapping, or I'll give you my jersey and we'll see if you can do better,' I retorted. But Tommy didn't take me on. He felt sure that I really meant what I said.

Naturally, the people with whom football had brought me into contact are intimately connected with the game. Some have left me unmoved; some have earned my praise, and some my criticism.

One man especially has been singled out for many words of praise by many people. Yes, 'the boss' at Old Trafford, Mr Busby. And he, I think, has learned better than any other manager the secret of being great. In every respect.

He has two interests at heart – Manchester United and his players. In that order. At some clubs, the manager is rarely seen by the players when they are training. And a summons to the office – 'upstairs', as footballers term it – leaves one with a sinking feeling and the thought: 'I wonder what I've done wrong?'

'The boss' at Old Trafford has an office, but he isn't tied to the desk inside it. His office is open any time for any player to walk in and discuss a problem or ask for advice. On the other hand, the players get plenty of opportunity to chat with the

boss – on the track, in the gym., in the treatment room, and even walking down the corridor.

To me, his great secret – if secret it be – is that he knows how to handle players. Each one requires individual attention, for footballers – like other folk – are not cast in one mould. But ‘the boss’ has a flair for knowing *how* each player should be handled. And he is more than fair with all of them, so long as they are fair with him.’

Some people accused him of never giving any players away to other clubs in need. Come, come. That’s expecting the impossible. After all, it’s Mr Busby’s job to look after the interests of Manchester United, and that means if he does transfer a player, he must get the best possible price. After all, no club can be forced to buy if they don’t want.

Where ‘the boss’ is exceptionally fair to the players on his staff is this – that when he has decided, reluctantly, that a man is not up to United’s standard, that player is called in for a frank talk. He is told if another club has made an offer – and reminded that it is the player himself who has the final word.

Most players, of course, realising that Manchester United have found them wanting, decide to make the break in the hope that they might find success elsewhere. But *they* make the decision. And I can think of at least one player who was given the chance to join another club, but decided he didn’t wish to move. He is still at Old Trafford, too.

In many ways, Peter Doherty and Matt Busby are dissimilar; but I owe both a great debt of thanks. And I am delighted to have the chance to record it now.

So to yet another personality in this game of football; a personality who has been called by many names – not all of them complimentary – during the past few seasons. Indeed, only last season he was labelled ‘The Krushchev of Football’ after acting in what, to many people, seemed a high-handed manner by banning certain Pressmen from the box at his club.

Yes, who else but Bob Lord, the chairman of Burnley? – And

I know well enough that he isn't everyone's cup of tea. In fact, my earliest recollection of his name goes back to that match a few seasons ago at Turf Moor when a United player was given marching orders and Mr Lord used some very outspoken language, including the term 'Teddy-boys'.

I suspect that this cutting reference wounded Mr Busby deeply, for above all he prizes the good name of Manchester United. I also suspect that I would have come under the classification of a 'Teddy-boy' in Mr Lord's opinion.

But I didn't lose any sleep at night over the Burnley butcher's opinion of me; and I have to be fair about him, too. I cannot forget an occasion last year when we met in New York and – strange though it may sound – he sought my opinion about a certain hotel.

Burnley were playing in the New York Soccer tournament at the time, and they caused a furore of controversy when their chairman withdrew them from one hotel and installed them in another which he believed to be more suitable. Other teams weren't very pleased by what they believed to be uppishness on Burnley's part. But give the man his due – he believes that so long as his players give of their best, nothing but the best is good enough for them. And Burnley footed the bill themselves.

Bob Lord certainly doesn't lack guts. And he doesn't lack the respect of his players, either. I have heard more than one stand up and say, before about 300 fellow-professionals: 'I can only speak well of him, for he has always been fair to me'.

Bob Lord may have made many enemies in the game because his blunt talking – sometimes out of turn – has offended many people. At least I give him credit for being among the first to step out of line and campaign on behalf of the players when the crucial question of wages cropped up. In the final analysis, Bob Lord is all right by me.

And so to the players, the men who make (or mar) the game. I'm going to start the argument now by naming the 11 men I

consider to be the best I have seen in Britain during the past few seasons. Here they are:

Trautmann (Manchester City); Armfield (Blackpool), Cantwell (Manchester United); Blanchflower (Spurs), Charles (Juventus), Mackay (Spurs); Jones (Spurs), Law (Manchester City), Hitchens (Aston Villa), Haynes (Fulham), Charlton (Manchester United).

Bert Trautmann occupies a special place in my Soccer notebook, because I know that every time I play at Maine-road I'll learn something from the blond giant. The years may be catching up with Bert now, but in my time at Old Trafford there have been many occasions on which his goalkeeping skill has excited my admiration. Cat-like reflexes, action swift and sure. Who can deny that but for Trautmann City might well have plunged into the Second Division several seasons ago?

I'll go along with the people who say one man doesn't make a team; but I do believe that there are times when one man can save a team. And I believe Bert Trautmann is such a man.

Blackpool, to their credit, have resisted all advances – including one from Manchester United – for their England right-back, Jimmy Armfield, a player I believe is destined to hold his international place for years.

c His play is 'cool, it is cultured; but to some people, a shade too adventurous. At times he has been taken to task for his forays upfield in support of his attack. But what his detractors seem to have overlooked is his wonderful speed of recovery. And why shouldn't he use that? Confidence in your own ability is a great thing. Armfield has the confidence, all right . . . and the ability to match it.

I'm a little concerned about picking Noel Cantwell, my teammate, at left-back, for I fear I can hear the taunt of favouritism. However, I will tell you something which should prove I am not looking through those red-tinted glasses. Five years ago, when I was playing for Doncaster Rovers, I named Noel as the best full-

back in the country, during a discussion on the merits of various players. And my opinion hasn't changed one bit.

When Noel was playing for the reserves at West Ham, Everton, I am told, inquired about him – and jibbed when quoted a price of £30,000. Manchester United had no such qualms; but they got him for slightly less.

A lot of folk said that United paid far too stiff a price for a man who wasn't even in the first team. Yet I reckon Noel was the best buy they have made in years. Here is one of the most thoughtful players in the game, a man who is steady and cool under the greatest pressure. He always gives the appearance of having something in reserve.

Quietly spoken, he is barely audible sometimes; and he plays his football the same way. You don't get the spell-binding effect of a Soccer spectacular – but the results are probably better. Noel has a brilliant football brain, hates the 'get-rid-of-it' technique which seems to be the stock in trade of so many full-backs. He appreciates the finer arts of the game – and practises them. What is more, he is ever ready to spend time with the youngster who is willing to admit that there is something still to be learned about the game.

Now for Danny Blanchflower, the man who makes Spurs tick. But anyone who thinks I am about to launch into a eulogy of praise can forget it. So much has been written and said of this great player that I could not add to the lustre. I will content myself by recalling what a team-mate told me, jokingly, the day I first joined up with the Irish party. 'Don't let Danny get you into a corner,' was the advice, 'or he'll talk your head off.'

All I can say is that Danny has buttonholed me many times since that day – and I've learned nothing but good Soccer sense from him.

Next to Danny I would place that gentle giant of football, John Charles – a man who lives up to the title which has been bestowed upon him. He is the greatest centre-half I have ever seen. As versatile as he is polished, he is the complete footballer.

Indeed, my greatest difficulty was deciding whether to pick him for centre-half or centre-forward.

Every team has to have its power-house . . . so here comes Dave Mackay, the man Spurs signed from Hearts with not a newspaper to foreshadow the event. Tough as teak, Mackay plays the game with verve and considerable skill. Yes, to be truthful, I can think of no better left-half . . . at the moment.

But I have the feeling that in a year or two we shall all be hailing Bobby Moore, of West Ham, as the nearest approach to a new Duncan Edwards. The sandy-haired Moore played at centre-half with West Ham's Youth Cup team of a few seasons ago; now he is making his presence felt at left-half (Dunc.'s position) and has won England Under-23 honours. I believe that within a couple of years we shall see in Moore a player who possesses the strength of a young lion and, at the same time, the skill and subtlety to make him great.

What a problem picking the forward line. For so few players measure up to my demands! But if Cliff Jones is good enough to play on Tottenham's *right-wing*, he's good enough for me. This human rocket played such a great part in Spurs' fabulous triumph last season. He's fast, elusive – and possesses a shot which goalkeepers have learned to fear.

There was a time, soon after he signed for Spurs, when I began to wonder if that £35,000 fee had gone down the drain. At that period, Jones was plagued by injury. But today I have no hesitation in saying that I rate him an even better *left-winger* than Gento, of Real Madrid fame . . . and Cliff is just as effective on the right.

For me, Jones's partner at inside-right would be Denis Law – to my mind the best and most complete inside-forward in Britain before he took a one-way ticket to Italy. This youngster, for whom Manchester City paid the staggering sum of more than £50,000, can play football under any conditions; he can be skilful and – despite his slight frame – he can play it hard. He also has a sharp eye for scoring chances.

Law has been faulted for his robust style of play; but for me that makes him outstanding as one of the few men in these islands who will fight for the ball *every* time. It shows that Denis Law has a real zest for the game. His threat to leave Maine-road rather than taste Second Division football shocked many folk last season; yet no-one was ever able to accuse him of giving less than 100 per cent. in every game for Manchester City. He fought as much as anyone to make sure they stayed in the top flight.

He is ever-ready to take on the donkey-work, yet skilled enough to make the ball work, too. In my opinion, he was often at least one move ahead of his forward colleagues in British football, so swiftly and incisively did his football brain assess situations.

Law has been criticised for his wandering, as well as his robust play. He has been faulted for going back too often in defence. It has been suggested that if he concentrated more on forward play, he would be even more effective. Well, the best player I've ever seen was Peter Doherty. And he and Denis Law played their game of football the same way.

My choice at centre-forward might occasion faint surprise among some readers – especially those who have an admiration for Bobby Smith (Spurs), or Ray Pointer (Burnley). While not detracting from the merits of these players, I plump for Gerry Hitchens, of Aston Villa – a leader who, in my view, won representative honours only belatedly last season. Certainly he has been a big factor in Villa's successful return to the First Division, and I feel that we have not yet seen the best of him. To my mind, apart from his ability to score goals, he leads his line with intelligence, and is a formidable exponent of the art of *football*.

And now for the player folk in the north of England love to hate – Johnny Haynes, the idol of Fulham and London in particular. I have played against England's skipper more than once, so I have plenty of opportunity to judge Johnny in action.

And I say without hesitation that this bias against Haynes is utterly wrong.

I wouldn't know whether or not he's mean or moody – I think that as a footballer, he's magnificent. He is a mature player who can 'read' a game extremely well. He covers a lot of ground, and he can pin-point passes with deceptive ease. Johnny Haynes is a 'general' well worth having on your side.

That leaves the left-wing spot, for whom I nominate Bobby Charlton, the Manchester United idol who has been hero-worshipped by young fans for the past two or three years. I know that Bobby cannot understand what makes these hero-worshippers tick. I also know that he would be prepared to play in any United team for which 'the boss' should pick him.

In my view – and I have been able to study him at close hand – Bobby is the type of player who must be left to work out his rôle as he sees it. Plans and policy talks are not for him, although he will always try to assimilate them. But I believe he depends on instinct more than anything else for his success at Soccer – and who can deny that he *has* been successful?

I think he is all the better for an occasional 'gingering-up', but the football skill he displays comes naturally. And the devastating shot from either foot puts the fear of death into opposing goalkeepers. A goal can stem from Charlton's boots as swiftly and as deadly as a bullet from a gun.

^ This, then, is the team I rate the best from Britain. I have seen all these players in action – and on nerve-wracking occasions, too. I believe this eleven has a balance of strength and skill in defence, skill and striking power in attack. You may think you can come up with another team just as good as the one I have listed. Well, that's your privilege.

Chapter Ten

INTO BATTLE...

THEY say that troubles never come singly; and certainly I have had my share of problems in football. Such as the time I had to face the possibility of prosecution by a football fan. I don't say this in any spirit of bravado – I state it merely as a fact. And I offer my opinion, for what the reader will think it is worth, that I was not really such a sinner on this occasion . . . although our manager, Mr Busby, later gave me the biggest ticking-off I've ever had in my life.

If Blackburn Rovers and Bryan Douglas are indelibly inscribed upon my memory, so are Luton Town and the angry spectator . . . who, oddly enough, came originally from Blackburn.

The game had been at Luton Town's ground, Kenilworth-road, and it was all over bar the walk back to the dressing-room. But suddenly, as I made my way from the field towards the tunnel, I was confronted by a stranger, and although I did my best to evade him, I could make no headway. After two or three attempts to get past the man, I realised that matters looked like becoming rather difficult. Especially when I came to the conclusion that the stranger was going to strike me. So I hit out.

Of course, this incident hit the headlines – and in some cases, the headlines really upset me, because the impression was given that I had assaulted a youth. Not only that, but people could have been forgiven if they had got the impression that I had hit a boy whose sole crime was that he had been merely seeking my autograph. In point of fact, the stranger who impeded my way to the dressing-room was almost as big as me, and as old, too, if I am any judge. I struck that blow because I was firmly under

the impression that he was about to strike me. And I didn't see the point in being the one to suffer punishment if there was anything I could do to prevent it.

Mr Busby hadn't been at that game, but our assistant manager, Jimmy Murphy, had, although I believe he didn't see the incident. However, when I reached the dressing-room I apologised to Mr Murphy and to Luton officials for becoming involved in such a nasty incident. I gathered from the police that there was little likelihood of a prosecution unless the injured party wanted to press charges. And from the injured party, with whom I had a chat, I gathered that he intended to forget the whole thing, despite the 'shiner' which I had given him.

Naturally, I was extremely upset. I knew that once again there would be people who would be only too ready to say I preferred to hit first and think afterwards. Yet I still cannot see exactly what else I could have done at the time. In situations like this, you have to make up your mind in a flash – and I didn't like the idea of scuttling like a hare for shelter.

I had been advised, of course, to say nothing to the Press about the incident – but that didn't stop a reporter and a photographer waiting to meet me off the train that night as we arrived in Manchester. I did my best to evade answering the questions – and I don't blame the reporter, because he had his job to do – while the photographer did his best to take pictures of me as I hurried on my way. Finally, desperate to be left alone – if not in peace – I made one last appeal for the photographer to desist taking pictures and warned . . . with my blood coming to the boil again . . . 'If you don't, I'll smash the camera'.

That did the trick – though I didn't enjoy reading of my threat the next morning. I felt that I appeared enough of a villain already, and my warning to the photographer had really been a move of desperation on my part.

On the Monday morning I went in to see 'the boss', Mr Busby, and I explained what had happened at Luton and offered my apologies for the incident. He listened to me while I had my say,

but it was obvious that he was most displeased about the whole business. And when he had heard me out, he made it quite clear that he wasn't thinking just of my reputation, but of Manchester United's. The sort of thing which had happened on the Saturday, he said, was not the sort of thing in which a Manchester United player should be involved. In fact, Mr Busby gave me the biggest verbal roasting of my life – and I'd had my ups and downs with Peter Doherty at Doncaster. Mr Busby didn't shout abuse at me, nor did he raise the roof; but in his quiet way he made it perfectly clear that he considered my action unwise, to say the least – and that it reflected harmfully on the club.

I was man enough – at least, I hope I was – to take the point without resentment, and I am happy to say that there is a sequel to the story. A sequel which ended in handshakes.

As I said earlier, the fan at Luton originally came from Blackburn, and last year, our first home game of the season was against the Rovers. When I arrived at the ground for the game, I was stopped by someone whose face seemed vaguely familiar. I felt that I should recognise this fellow – and so I should. It was the fan from Luton! We had a chat, and finished up on the friendliest of terms. In fact, he had every reason to feel pleased about the outcome of his visit to Old Trafford, for the Rovers kicked off the season by administering a thrashing to us!

No-one will dispute that I've good reason to remember Blackburn Rovers and Luton Town. I have also good cause not to forget Windsor Park, Belfast – and the notorious Battle of Belfast after the game between Northern Ireland and Italy. Yes, while we're on the subject of swapping punches, I might as well go the whole hog and tell you my story about the footbrawl of all time.

The match in Belfast was scheduled as a World Cup qualifying game, with the winners going to Sweden for the final stages of the tournament. But the neutral referee, Istvan Zolt, of Hun-

gary, became fog-bound in London, and could not reach Belfast in time to officiate at the match – so the game was labelled as a friendly, to the bitter disappointment of thousands of expectant Irish fans who had been anticipating a blood-tingling football match.

No doubt the tempers of the Irish supporters were roused by the news – only shortly before kick-off time – that they were not to see a full-blooded World Cup qualifier, after all. Certain it is that the match finished in utter chaos, with fans seeking Italians to clout, and with Irish skipper Danny Blanchflower asking each of his players to escort an Italian to safety . . .

The 50,000 fans who crowded Windsor Park must have been smouldering with resentment almost from the kick-off. They felt cheated, no doubt, of a thriller, of a battle which was vital for prestige. Instead of the game deciding which team went to Sweden, they had paid hard-earned money to watch a match where the result counted for absolutely nothing.

It had been impossible to find a neutral referee to replace Mr Zolt, so Irishman Tommy Mitchell was appointed to take charge – and he certainly had his hands full. Incident piled upon incident. One Italian player was ordered off; another was mauled by infuriated spectators; players raised their fists to each other as tempers soared beyond boiling point; and tackles were made which could have maimed for life.

The game was not so old before the first incident happened. It ended with Irish centre-forward Wilbur Cush and Italian Bugatti going down. The next incident came when winger Billy Bingham was chopped down just outside the penalty area by Italian left-half Segato. Then Billy and centre-half Ferrario crashed into each other; and when they rose from the ground, after the shock of the impact, fists were raised. All this, and the game had not even progressed beyond the quarter-time stage!

Then the Italians began to get into their stride, and with 23 minutes gone, they took the lead. It was Chiggia who put the Italian, he was defending himself – and, what was more, all

he had wanted to do was to shake Jackie Blanchflower by the hand! I was glad when I saw that the charges had been dismissed; for defence and prosecution had been agreed upon one matter – that it was Ferrario who had struck the first blow.

Everyone seemed to have his own version of what had happened during the riotous finale to the match. I was given the credit for having felled four people in my efforts to defend the Italians. I can only say that if I did poleaxe four people while trying to guide Signor Gratton to safety, I didn't know about it. Frankly, I had neither the time nor the inclination to stop and admire the effects of my efforts to get Gratton to safety.

If the footbrawl match had caused a sensation in Ireland, it was nothing to the outcry that arose in Italy. The Italian newspaper reporters almost dipped their pens in vitriol, and for days they ranted and raged about the way their national heroes had been mauled in Belfast. 'A scene of savagery and unbelievable cowardice,' said one. I presume the Irish fans, who so greatly outnumbered the Italian players, were being accused of cowardice.

Another writer termed the battle as a display of 'collective hysteria, unchained fury'. And yet a third described the affair this way . . . 'We never saw such a way of playing, and never met such a public'.

The repercussions were so great that the whole business reached government level. The Italians called for a full report from the International Football Federation, after demands from M.P.'s that an official protest should be sent to Northern Ireland about the 'insufficient protection' which had been given to the visitors. Italian Soccer chiefs were saying, in fact, that if their team had to play again in Belfast – and, remember, the official World Cup qualifier had still to be decided – it would be 'behind closed and barricaded gates' . . . and without fans.

The president of the Italian Football Association, Dr Ottavio Barassi, took a saner view of the matter. He said that despite the bitterness of his fellow-countrymen, he would press for the

World Cup qualifying game to be played in Belfast. Of the incidents which had made a mockery of the friendly match he said: 'If we were afraid of things like this, it would be the end of sport'.

But team-manager Dr Alberto Foni took a different attitude altogether. 'We shall never play in Belfast again,' he decreed. 'The tie must go to London or Glasgow.'

Frankly, the behaviour of some of the Irish supporters that day did much to harm our good name in the world of Soccer. I still refuse to believe that all the people who invaded Windsor Park pitch were intent on pasting Italian players. But those who did sally forth with the intention of creating trouble certainly achieved the desired effect.

You may consider it strange, this criticism of my fellow-countrymen. Especially coming from me. But let me remind you of one thing . . . this was one time that I couldn't claim to have been the injured party, so I could take a more or less balanced view of matters.

And when the World Cup game did go on – in Belfast – a month later, I wasn't even there! This time I was the one who was fog-bound.

I was happy to see that in this second game, despite one incident, reason prevailed. Northern Ireland won the match to qualify for Sweden and the final stages of the World Cup. And it was in Sweden that this little country, after spending years in the shadows as the poor relation of British football, became hailed at long last as a world-class Soccer power.

Chapter Eleven

THE MERRY-GO-ROUND

IF Fulham (in my view) gave Jimmy Hill rather a raw deal, they certainly went to the other extreme in their efforts to keep Johnny Haynes from the grasp of the Italians. And Fulham's chairman, comedian Tommy Trinder, wiped the smiles off the faces of a lot of other League-club bosses when he announced his views on the value of England's skipper.

Ho, ho, ho . . . this was Soccer slavery with a vengeance. The player binding the club in chains. But there are two sides to every story. Including the one about the New Deal for footballers, and the abolition of the maximum wage.

Let me say that I have never considered myself to be a Soccer slave, although, of course, there have been aspects of the players' contract in the past which I have disliked. However, I do hold that no player can, in all honesty, expect to be able to take off from one club to another on a sudden whim. In other words, I believe that there *should* be a retain-and-transfer system . . . with safeguards for club and player.

After all, if a club pays £50,000 for a man (or more, as Manchester City did in the case of Denis Law), the club is entitled to demand value for money. The directors certainly didn't pay such a vast sum of money because they wanted to get rid of the player.

My views about players and contracts are simple and straightforward – and, I think, commonsense. Even before the no-maximum clause became a fact, I didn't go along with those players who thought they had all found an El Dorado. Obviously some outstanding footballers would command outstanding terms; and I wouldn't deny the right of any footballer to obtain as much as he could from his club.

But I felt we must be realistic, that while this handful of shining stars might look for (and get) something approaching the moon, the vast majority of professionals would have to be content with what was generally regarded as a reasonable figure. I felt sure that that 'reasonable figure' would be a fair increase on the wage which had operated in past seasons.

Tommy Trinder, in my view, boosted the potential pay packets of one or two players at other clubs when he told the world how much he thought Haynes was worth paying to keep him. Something like £80 a week is the general idea of Johnny's new contract – and good luck to him. If United had offered me similar terms, I would have been the fool many folk think I am to have rejected them.

At the same time, some people brought up the argument that while Haynes was doing very well for himself, his 10 team-mates would take a dim view of one man being on such a good thing, while the remainder jogged along on a mere fiver increase or so. Indeed, I read that some of the Fulham players were not at all inclined to sign on for the terms offered them.

Fair enough. The point which I feel is pertinent is this: that the time to crib is before you re-sign for your club. Once you have put pen to paper, you must accept the consequences of your deed. A man is good for what he can get; but once he *has* decided to accept the terms (and he knew them before he resigned), he must pull his weight for the team and honour the contract which has been agreed.

As for those players who have been the subject of offers from Italian clubs – good luck to them, too. In my days at Doncaster, there was a considerable amount of newspaper speculation that I was the target for an Italian club. I don't know how far matters got, but I can only say that if I had been given the chance to leave England for lire-laden Italy, I would have swum the English Channel and the Mediterranean to get there, if necessary.

I know . . . there are language difficulties, strange people, strange customs, homesickness and all the rest. They are obviously

matters which must be weighed against taking the plunge. But remember one thing. Even today, in Britain, Soccer doesn't spell security. The future for professional footballers has become a lot brighter; but a £10,000 signing-on fee is a glittering prospect. It means that when your career comes to an end, you have sufficient money available to carve out a new career in business.

I believe that language difficulties and homesickness are problems which can be overcome, so long as you know deep down that you are gaining security in the long run. I could have stayed at home in Ireland – but I crossed the sea because I knew that English football had something better to offer me. I love football; I'm wild about it. It's like being paid to do a job which gives you nothing but pleasure (except when your team takes a thrashing). But no-one turns down the payment when it's offered. No-one looks a gift-horse in the mouth.

For 10 years and more now, football has been my life, as well as my bread and butter. It's even earned me a little jam. Today I'm still at an age when I can see almost as long ahead for me as a player. But there is no endless vista as there was 10 years ago. Yet when the Soccer bug bites you, the 'poison' gets into the system. You become an addict – to football. Who can say, once he has tasted the sweets of Soccer, that he will be able to fall out of love with the game when he can no longer play in the top flight?

In Soccer, as in every other job, there are people who take it up because they have a reasonable aptitude for the work and because it brings in a reasonable reward. Some folk could give up football tomorrow and they wouldn't shed a tear; but not the true, Soccer-mad character.

I'll admit that years ago I didn't think about the game quite as I think today. But I realise now that when I do finally hang up my boots, nothing would please me more than to stay in football in some capacity. I don't quite see myself as manager Harry Gregg – but stranger things have happened. The day may even

dawn when I fancy trying my hand at plying this perilous trade. And perilous it is.

Football management is the job where you undergo 90 minutes' torture every Saturday afternoon from the end of August to the end of April. And during the remaining months you are wracking your brains for next season's solution to last season's team problems. Football management has broken many men and made a select few. The successes – and I use the word sparingly – can be counted almost on the fingers of one hand. Matt Busby, Stan Cullis, Bill Anderson . . . these men have held the same jobs for a long time. A few others have achieved fame, too – but the test is still to come. The test of whether they can hang on to the ladder of success.

Last season (ignoring the minor casualties) saw Johnny Carey axed by Everton and Cliff Britton part company with Preston North End, yet within a short while it was reported that both men were in line for the vacant Plymouth job . . . which had as good as gone to Vic Buckingham . . . who took over at Sheffield Wednesday . . . after Harry Catterick had left to take over at Goodison . . . in succession to Johnny Carey.

Yes, management is a real-life merry-go-round. Before Preston chose Jimmy Milne to succeed Cliff Britton, the knowing ones looked no further than Tom Finney. Here was an obvious choice, they felt, although he had had no previous managerial experience.

Last season, for the umpteenth time, Stanley Matthews was urged to call it a day and hang up his boots. There were people who said – as they had been saying each successive season – that Stan was past it, that if Blackpool were relegated he would never stand up to the strain of Second Division football. Blackpool escaped the big drop by the narrowest of margins – and Stan was quoted, during the close season, as having ideas of resigning for something like £100 a week.

I don't for one minute think that Blackpool could – or would – offer him anything like that figure. I don't really believe Stan

ever thought he would – or could – command such a salary with any club. But I don't blame him for getting the best terms possible. All the wonderful success he has achieved, he has earned by hard work and dedication to the game.

If he can keep on playing – and still be good enough to be offered terms by a First Division club – who would say he should refuse? Provided that he feels he can still give value for money. I know I'd like to think that Manchester United would be offering me terms when I'm 46.

Inevitably, when Matthews does retire from playing, there will be suggestions that he will go into managership. A player with such vast experience must have something to impart to the game. I wonder . . . just as I wonder about myself.

No doubt Matthews has already asked himself the questions I had considered. For it seems that no matter how many times a manager loses his job, he is always ready to come back and take more punishment. Would I want to be part of the business? – My head tells me that most likely I would be a fool if I did – while my heart says, with equal certainty, that football is my only love. And asks, with some dismay at the prospect: 'What would you do if you severed all connection with Soccer?'

This great game is the subject of argument – even international strife – wherever you go. It enthral the man in the street, it exasperates him. It is even used to measure the international prestige of nations. I often reflect how strange it is that on a Saturday afternoon you can stand and watch a crowd of people going to a match. To look at, they are ordinary folk, much alike. Once inside the gates of the ground they become howling dervishes for 90 minutes – then subside into their ordinary selves again.

Soccer as a means of promoting international friendship has a strange aspect, sometimes. What a furore is sparked off when England are whipped abroad! Or any of the other home countries, for that matter.

The dismal failures of Northern Ireland and the Republic of

Ireland to qualify for the 1962 World Cup tournament in Chile, for example, signalled an outburst of controversy . . . and there were cries that a combined team was the answer for future international competition. I recall similar outpourings in England, too, during the past. 'Field a Great Britain team!' became the slogan.

Frankly, if I may be permitted to express an Irish point of view, I suppose we should blame the Hungarians for starting the whole thing. For ever since those Magical Magyars came to Wembley in 1953 and licked the pants off England, we have had a complex about the way to run an international Soccer outfit.

So far as Ireland (using the term in its broadest sense) is concerned, I doubt if we could ever reach agreement on a joint team, despite this having been the case in the dim past. Yes, even if the statutes of F.I.F.A. could be changed. As for a Great Britain team, if it *were* possible actually to choose one, surely Northern Ireland would be entitled to demand inclusion!


Earlier in this book, I picked a team – with which, no doubt, many of you will disagree in some instances. Imagine, then, having to name *four* lots of selectors who would meet together to agree upon a Great Britain team? And who, I might ask, would select the selectors?

When the Hungarians came upon the scene in 1953, many people evolved their own solutions to the problem facing British Soccer. The aim was the same – a team fit to take on any country in the world again – and win. One person wanted the head of England team-manager Walter Winterbottom on a platter; another wanted the selectors to resign en bloc; a third demanded the dismissal of all the players; a fourth cried out in anguish for a Great Britain team. And it was all to be done at once.

I don't claim to be psychic, but even before 1953 I had been arguing that footballers should not have to make a fetish of cross-country runs and lapping. I felt, to take my own case, that I should be taught gymnastics to make the body supple, that I

should be encouraged to perfect ball-control with hands and feet. Too often too many footballers trained on and on in a wearying kind of way – without the very thing of which they were supposed to be master . . . the football. Some of our training methods were right, of course; but came the Hungary game and suddenly we didn't do anything right.

Well, I'm open to correction, but I do feel that while we were doing some things wrong, we should not have tried to change the old order overnight, as it were. It is accepted that we taught the world *how* to play football. We were the missionaries, and we taught well. For the pupils took in everything that we could pass on, then proceeded to add their own embellishments. They let their imagination run riot – while the tutors stood still and watched.

Once we had seen that the Hungarians (and others) had added refinements to the art which we had taught, we rushed in to  to catch up. Having seen the error of our ways (in standing still) we committed another error (too much too soon).

The old stagers who reckoned that 'five years ago we would have beaten that lot' might have been right. Because five years earlier the Continentals were still trying to perfect the moves which flowed effortlessly from their feet on the lush Wembley turf.

I think it was Danny Blanchflower – an Irishman, you'll notice – who said that football is a game of imagination and improvisation. But we had become stolid and unimaginative. Yet the finished article which was put on display at Wembley wasn't produced overnight – as we tried to alter things after that disastrous day. Remember what I said in a previous chapter – that Northern Ireland's World Cup success of 1958 began to take shape several years earlier.

It takes time to achieve success, and I'm not sure that we have learned all the lessons properly yet. For the Irish, it seems, the rebuilding process must begin all over again . . . with an eye to the World Cup tournament of 1966. And while it could be so

bold as to predict who will win next year's World Cup joust, I won't be such an idiot.

No sportsman – or journalist – could make such a prediction with confidence unless he had seen every team in action and thus been able to judge their potentialities. Which brings me once again to the Press. And while I'll be hanged, drawn and quartered, I'll stick out my neck, just the same. For I feel strongly that the Press should remember its responsibility when reporting big games – especially those played abroad. The Press forms public opinion – in football, if not in politics. And some sportswriters mislead the stay-at-home fans, in my view. It may not be intentional – but it is a fact.

The human angle – that's what the writer goes for too often. I don't think anyone could deny that if England played Spain in Madrid, and a bull somehow got loose on the field, the majority of reporters on the spot would send home 1,000 words about the chase to capture the unfortunate animal . . . and 250 words on the match itself. Yet the fan at home must rely on the reports he reads; and I think he should be told about the standard of the match, the successes and the failures, the whys and wherefores of victory or defeat. The story of the bull should have a place – but not at the expense of the straight match report.

If I appear to be telling the Press their job – maybe I am. I don't say they will do things my way from now on; but I am entitled to my say. As reporters, they are entitled to criticise my displays (something they have often done) and by the same standard I am entitled to criticise theirs.

Yet before I have the weight of the British Press down on me like a ton of bricks, let *me* play fair. I number some newspapermen among my friends, and I have argued with them time and again. They counter-attack . . . and I see their point of view. We agree, for instance, that football is a matter of opinion, that one man sees a match from a different angle to another. Yet I feel that two men reporting the same match must agree about cer-

tain things which happened in it. For instance, the basic pattern of the game and which players were outstanding.

But the Press, too, needs some co-operation – and doesn't always get it from football clubs. Lamentably, the reporter sometimes finds a manager will never find the time to deal courteously – or honestly – with an inquiry. A manager's job is to do his best for the club; a reporter's job is to get facts about football stories. If a manager is caught out in a deliberate lie (maybe about a pending transfer) the reporter will never trust him again – and will take a chance with the story next time.

I'll sum it up by repeating what one reporter told me about my own boss. He said: 'Matt Busby won't volunteer any transfer news; but if you pick up the story on your own and ask him, he'll give you a straight answer. If your story is right, he'll admit it; if it's wrong, he'll tell you so – and you can take his word. *That* doesn't apply to a lot of managers'.

I didn't want to preach in this chapter; I hope I haven't. If people feel that some of the views I have expressed are strong, my excuse (and I don't really feel I need one) is that they are sincere.

It has been pointed out before today that there are almost as many England internationals walking around as there are football clubs in the League. And there are certainly many more arm-chair critics than there are professional footballers. The news, the views – they're part of the whole which make our national game what it is. Television, the missing millions – you could go on and on airing your ideas.

I'll settle now for these reflections. That the public should be able to trust the Press; that the Press should be able to trust the clubs; and that now we have a New Deal for the players, it's up to the professionals to put more into the game than ever before. We all want the same thing – good football, and winning teams.

Chapter Twelve

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING . . . A GOALKEEPER

I may have done some daft things in the heat of the moment – I hope that I've never been guilty of an action calculated to imperil an opponent's chances of earning a living at football.

Yet, whether you like it or not, this great game of ours, with all its thrills and moments of sheer artistic skill, carries with it the risk of permanent injury. Every time a player goes out on the field, he knows that it might be the last game he'll play. There is no excuse for the 'killer' setting out to beat a man by crippling him; an unlucky accident can do the job just as effectively.

The point I'm setting out to make is that a footballer's life – which, in all conscience, is short enough, any way – can be curtailed in a split-second by an awkward fall or an accidental collision with an opponent. It's a point which I thought about anxiously myself towards the end of last season, when a recurring shoulder injury cost me the chance of three international caps on tour with Northern Ireland.

The specialist advised me to rest the shoulder completely – and that meant the football season for me ended in mid-April. It also meant that young Jack McClelland, of Arsenal, took over in goal on the Irish tour . . . so the injury was, in effect, a two-edged threat. I had to get fit again – and I recognised that I would have to fight once more for my place in the international team, just as I had when Norman Uprichard was the established No. 1. Only now the position was reversed.

A goalkeeper, of course, is no more liable to suffer serious injury than any other member of the team. Remember full-back

Jimmy Meadows, of Manchester City, in the F.A. Cup final of a few years ago; remember, too, Alick Jeffrey, Doncaster Rovers' brilliant young inside-forward, who broke a leg playing in an Under-23 international.

Meadows managed to make the attempt at a come-back last season; Jeffrey also overcame the handicap of having his other leg broken, and fought his way back to fitness for League football. Unfortunately for Alick, he had received £4,000 compensation (his club got £15,000) when it was thought he would never kick a ball again. He was unable to return to League football in England unless he repaid the £4,000 . . . and that proved impossible, for – as he pointed out – you can't live on fresh air during the years you are out of action. Jeffrey, indeed, had to go to Australia to take up the threads of his Soccer career again.

Nat Lofthouse (Bolton) and Tom Finney (Preston) found their final seasons in football dogged in injury – in fact, there is little doubt that the retirement of these players was brought about prematurely. Some Preston fans seemed to think that Finney could – and should – have continued to play for Preston last season; they obviously believe that he would have saved their team from relegation. Of course, there is no doubt that North End missed the genius of the fair-haired, slimly-built man who was a star in any forward position. But he had the right to decide for himself.

It must have give Finney a lot of food for thought, that decision to pack up while he was still at the top. But at least he had come close to the end of his playing days – or am I being unduly pessimistic? At any rate, I consider the case of Colin McDonald was more tragic.

McDonald received an injury during an Inter-League game in Ireland. At that time, he was England's goalkeeper. Despite a valiant attempt to make a return to the game, McDonald had to cry quits. His consolation was £5,000 in compensation, while his club, Burnley, received £30,000.

Another player for whom I felt extremely sorry last season

was Jimmy Hill, the Fulham man who has done so much work for his fellow-professionals as chairman of the Professional Footballers' Association. At the end of the season, he was freed . . . wondering about his career; or if, indeed, he had any future left as a player. For he was still trying to regain fitness from injury.

Fulham rejected emphatically that Hill's release was in any way affected by his activities as a union official. And I don't think anyone in their right minds could believe that Fulham were victimising Hill on that account. On the other hand, I do consider that the case of Jimmy Hill merits attention. I feel that if any player's fitness is in doubt at the end of a season, it should be an obligation on the part of his club to retain him until it is proved that he can play no more or until he is completely fit again.

Why should a player be thrown on the Soccer scrap-heap through no fault of his own? To my way of thinking, if the club retains him until it is certain he cannot play again, the club has done the fair thing. If the footballer does come back, the club can then put him on offer with a clear conscience – it may even decide he is too valuable to lose.

At least, if he's on offer and he is fully fit, he has a chance of getting a new club. But if he's not fit, which other club would be willing to sign him on a contract?

The case of Barrie Betts is exceptional, I know – but it does point a moral. Barnsley believed he would never play again; Stockport County took a chance that he *had* regained his fitness – and got him for nothing. I've no doubt League president Joe Richards, who also happens to be the chairman of the Barnsley club, has often wished that Betts had not been allowed to go. For Stockport sold Betts to Manchester City for nearly £10,000 – and he has been one of the consistent successes in City's team. There has even been talk of him being in line for an international cap!

As I said earlier, the injury blow can fall upon a player in any position. At the same time, I don't go along with those

people who rate the loss of a centre-forward or an inside-forward as the greatest tragedy a club can suffer.

These players are regarded as the king-pins, although defenders are gradually creeping up into the star ratings when it comes to valuation on the transfer market. But for some reason I cannot fathom, the goalkeeper seems to be the poor relation. And I know many folk reckoned Manchester United manager Matt Busby was mad to pay £23,000 for *any* goalkeeper, let alone Harry Gregg.

Just *how* important – or unimportant – is the 'keeper, in relation to the rest of the team? – Here's my view . . . and I'll try to forget that I'm probably prejudiced.

Let me give you the viewpoints on the goalkeeper's job – or part of it – by two famous people. One is Arsenal's Welsh international 'keeper, Jack Kelsey, says of his job: 'I like plenty to do. The busier I am, the better I am pleased'.

In his book, *Over the Bar*, Kelsey refers to an injury against Wolves which had undermined his confidence – especially in the matter of gathering crosses, which he had considered to be one of his strong points. Jack says he had his own way of practising his 'keeping, out on the hard practice ground. In time, he remedied the trouble.

He shows how much thought he puts into his game by illustrating how he perfected 'a grasp of angles'. He would line up five players and get them to shoot in at him. If he found himself within easy reach of the ball, he knew that he had taken up the right position.

Jack also gives his view on the 'keeper's area of responsibility. At one time, he says, he tended to consider that any ball in the penalty area was his, even if it were floating across the 18-yard line itself. But in top-flight Soccer, he claims, you cannot do that, for fear of what would happen should you be challenged and drop the ball. 'Now I do not go a yard beyond the goalkeeper's area,' he says. 'I'm governor of the six-yard box, I like to think – but that is as far as it goes.'

Well, Jack is entitled to his view on the matter. But now let's see what another expert has to say.

International Soccer critic Willy Meisl puts his sentiments on record this way. 'Hungary's goalkeeper, Guyla Grosics, again stressed that the 'keeper of class is the true third back or, if you want it that way, the fourth full-back. His personality must dominate at least his own penalty area. He must command his defenders.

'A goalkeeper who thinks his exclusive task is to stand between the posts and produce fine saves when shot at cannot be considered of international calibre. He must rush out, not only to reduce chances for an oncoming forward to hit his target (the goal) by narrowing the angle, but also to intercept.

'In short, he must live as much and more with the game at any second as every other player. That many a successful move must be started by the 'keeper is a home truth.'

Those are Meisl's sentiments. And they confirm my own. Maybe I imagine this is the way I try to play football – but I don't think so. And if you think Willy Meisl is just another armchair critic, think again. He is steeped in Soccer – he is a former goalkeeper of Austria, and brother of Hugo Meisl, the 'Herbert Chapman' of the Continent.

I may appear to have stressed in this book how I keep goal – but that is how I see my job. And I submit that a goalkeeper is no less important than any member of the forward line – and that goes for the transfer fee, too.

Admittedly, the forwards' job is to carry out attacks and to score goals. But the goalkeeper is the *last* line of *defence*; and it's no use the forwards scoring seven times if the 'keeper lets through eight goals. The goalkeeper is the first man who can build up an attack for his team, too. Remember that.

To my way of thinking, the 'keeper must be able to stamp his personality on a game. He's certainly got to try to impress his full-backs and his centre-half with his ability. They must know that they can rely on him – just as he has to be confident he can rely on them.

He must be the boss of his penalty area – yes, I go further than Jack Kelsey – and I believe that the backs must know when their 'keeper will come out for a ball, while he must be certain he can rely on them to leave it to him.

As a youngster, I didn't go in much for the theory of the game; maybe even today I play mostly by instinct. But I find nowadays that when I *am* playing well, I run the show in defence. And I think that applies to many other goalkeepers. Certainly they have more to do with running the show at the back than anyone else. And if I am having a bad game – yes, I'll agree with my critics that I *do* have some – my indecision can be costly indeed.

If I'm hesitant and out of form, the defenders in front of me soon sense that I've got the jitters – and they become affected, too. Confidence stems outwards from the goalkeeper; so does lack of confidence. And I reckon that's one of the things the 'keeper has to overcome at the start of every match.

A goalkeeper can start an attacking movement by an accurate throw out to one of his team-mates or by a long kick, judged well. That is what I always try to do – and believe me, there's no place where I've been called more by the fans than at Windsor Park, Belfast, for throwing the ball out. Why they should dislike this is beyond me.

True, they have paid their money and they are entitled to express their opinions. But if any of those people happen to read this book, let me say right now that they could call me until the cows came home . . . and I would still throw that ball out.

There are times, of course, when I may appear to be doing the wrong thing. But the intention to do right is always there. I am trying to find one of my own men every time I get rid of the ball, whether I'm throwing it out or kicking it. So far as I am concerned, I might just as well bang the ball slap into the middle of the crowd as boot it aimlessly down the centre of the pitch. I agree that my tactics don't come off every time; but even so, I go on trying and I plug away until I achieve success.

Incidentally, I might say that the prospect of receiving a

shoulder charge never bothers me – despite the attentions of Mr Lofthouse in that Wembley Cup final. It's up to me to be alert for such things.

As for having to go out to deal with high crosses from wingers, I am content to rely on my own ability and judgment. I reckon I've got a safe pair of hands – if I hadn't I wouldn't be a goalkeeper! – and the man between the posts cannot afford to be afraid of any centre-forward.

The one move which, I think, is dangerous from a goalkeeper's point of view, stems from the winger (or any other forward) who can work the ball along the bye-line from the corner flag towards the goal post. When I see that happening, I've really got to be on my toes. For I know the odds are on the winger cutting the ball backwards low across the penalty area – and if his colleagues are anticipating this, it's a ready-made opportunity to shoot strongly while having all the goal as a target area.

The only other time I reckon I'm on a hiding to nothing is when the opposing side is awarded a penalty. That is the one occasion, in theory, when the man shooting for goal should never miss. He's the advantage of a dead ball; and the poor goalkeeper must remain stock still until the ball begins to travel towards the target. If the 'keeper is lucky, he may get a clue as to which way the ball will go – but sometimes, of course, he's fooled even by that.

Yes, the one time a goalkeeper's chance of making a save is practically hopeless is when he's facing the man who is taking a penalty. The award of a spot-kick should automatically spell a goal – but for one thing. The man taking the penalty knows this . . . and, human nature being what it is, he's just as liable as the 'keeper to be a bundle of nerves.

There is no magic formula by which you can make certain of scoring from the penalty spot, just as the goalkeeper has no magic formula for making sure of saving the shot. The moment the ball begins to move, the goalkeeper is on his way – and, I repeat, sometimes it's the wrong way. There is no second chance

for the player taking the spot-kick, or for the man trying to save it.

So next time your favourite team wins a match through a penalty goal, don't just regard the scoring of it as an inevitable formality. And if the goalkeeper does save the shot, please don't say that the player who failed to score should be shot! Remember, both players were doing their best . . . and if further proof were needed, I might add that while I've conceded penalty goals before today, I've also saved a few.

So there you have it; my estimate of the job I have to do, and my valuation of the goalkeeper's worth to his team. I need hardly add that when the question of equal pay crops up, I'm a fervent supporter of the view that the 'keeper is entitled to as much consideration as every other fellow in the team. Though I've a little confession to make later.

Chapter Thirteen

THE DEBT I OWE

I MAY not be the footballer who would top the poll in a popularity parade. I may not be the man other folk would set up as a shining example to would-be Soccer players. But I can tell any boy who has the stars in his eyes that if he thinks it is impossible for him to get to the top in football, he can take heart from my story, in one respect.

No matter how humble your background, you can still achieve the highest honours the game has to offer. I know – because my own beginnings were as humble as any.

I have reason to be grateful to many famous people in the game for the help and encouragement they have given me. I must also give my thanks to six people who could best be described as . . . just football fans. They are my mother, my sister, my three brothers, and my wife.

I was the eldest son in our family – and the potential breadwinner. Yet I know that sacrifices were made on my behalf. When I was chosen to play in schoolboy internationals in Belfast, someone had to find the fare for me.

While we never went without the essentials of life, there was no money to spare for luxuries. And the cost of the train fare to Belfast came under the latter heading. Yet somehow, my mother always managed to scrape up the money. And, because she was determined that I should look just as respectable as any of the other lads in the team, she always made sure that the clothes I wore on those occasions could stand the scrutiny of anyone.

I didn't need to be told – I knew that someone in our household would have to wait a bit longer for a suit or a pair of shoes just so that I could be respectably dressed when I went off to

play in Belfast. Yet I never heard my sister or any of my brothers complain that I was favoured.

On occasion, I have even known my sister borrow a pair of football boots for me from another lad who lived further up the street. His boots were in far better shape than mine – but I was too ashamed to ask him to lend them to me. Not so my sister – she begged for them on my behalf . . . and without hesitation.

I can never forget such kindness from my family. And I can never forget the help I have received from my wife. There have been moments of despair – but always she has given me encouragement and new hope.

So, you Soccer-mad youngsters of today, take heart from what I have said. It doesn't matter if your shoes have holes in the soles – so long as you have the ability and the will to succeed. Which, of course, means the willingness to work.

I'll make a confession. Every time I play football for my country I pocket my £50 fee under false pretences. For if the international fee were abolished tomorrow, I would still be just as happy to play for Northern Ireland. It isn't even a matter of pride in playing for my country – *I just love to play football.*

If ever the day arrives when football becomes hard work to me, I'll know it's time to quit. It has been said many times before, but I'll repeat the phrase: Football is the greatest game in the world. I mean that, sincerely. And if you love the game, all the hard work you must put into it doesn't seem like work – it really means that you are doing something you enjoy . . . and being paid for the privilege.

I'm afraid that I have seen too many youngsters who, having shown potential ability to make the top grade, forget the first lesson as soon as they sign professional forms. At 15 and 16 they're ready and willing to train morning and afternoon; but at 17, as soon as they become professionals, they forget to work any more. Immediately they show a marked lack of interest for the very things which earned them the professional status. They just want the glamour of being paid to play.

To my sorrow – and sometimes my anger – I've seen international footballers taking the attitude that Soccer is a game to forget once the match is over. I regret to say this, but I've heard players whose names are household words much further afield than Britain turn to a colleague and say: 'For goodness sake, shut up. We're fed-up with hearing you always talk about football'.

I've seen so-called stars forget that they're supposed to be training; instead, they've walked around discussing the latest films or the previous night's TV programmes.

I'm happy to say I never had to force myself to go down to the ground – anywhere – for training. I hate to see the end of the season looming up – for me, they could play football 12 months of the year. And, while it may have been wrong, I've nothing but admiration for the international I know who was so keen on the game that during the close season, he took part in local club competitions.

These competitions attracted scouts from many clubs, so the international did his best to make sure he wasn't recognised. He soaped his hair, parted it in the middle, and plastered the waves down. He also grew a toothbrush moustache to help hide his identity even further.

As I say, this player may have been wrong in taking part in such competitions. Certainly his club would have been staggered to hear it. And today, as the years have passed, he has learned wisdom. But then he thought only about getting a game of football.

That, for me, is the sort of spirit you need to make a success of the job you have chosen. And I suppose, really, the true footballer never grows up. He gets a kick out of playing at Wembley . . . just as he got a kick out of playing in the back-yard as a boy, pretending he was a star.

Even today I become a kid again when I go out in the garden to keep an eye on the youngsters. Very few minutes have passed before I'm throwing a ball up on the roof of the house and catching it – the ball, I mean! – when it rolls down. Then,

after a bit, I pretend I'm a centre-forward and dribble that ball all over the lawn. My wife reckons I do more damage to the plants than the children – and the neighbours must think I'm crazy!

I'm open to the charge that my goalkeeping is too adventurous – even reckless, sometimes – but I couldn't change my style for anyone. It's the only way I know, and whoever employs me must accept it. I have been helped to improve my game, of course, but basically I play as I did when I was a boy. Because that's the way I get my fun out of football; the sheer joy of participating in a game is the greatest thing to me.

In my time I've had uncomplimentary remarks passed about my goalkeeping – and about myself. I've been called a wild man . . . and it's true. I *am* wild – about football. I feel proud when I recall the day Doncaster trainer Jack Hodgson said to me: 'You're never away from the ground – why don't you bring your bed down here?'

Jack was joking. But I'd rather have heard him say that than: 'You're late for training this morning – what kept you?'

Allied to this love for the game must be the will to win. That doesn't mean you must set out to achieve victory by any means; but bubbling inside you for 90 minutes must be the devil, the fight, the refusal to admit defeat until that final whistle has gone.

I always enjoyed playing against West Ham because I reckoned that they weren't just a collection of individuals who played without thought for the team game. You could see that they had worked out moves, and you had to do some smart thinking yourself to counter them.

After Noel Cantwell arrived at Old Trafford, I mentioned this one day. Noel agreed with my assessment, but surprised me by admitting that in his view, there was often something lacking. 'I could never quite work out what it was,' he said, 'but since I joined United, I've realised what we lacked. At West Ham I preached tactics and the necessity for football skill – but one

thing I didn't preach enough was that players must possess that bit of devil and will to win . . . all the time.'

That's one reason I admire Manchester United. I know that while I'm good enough for them, they'll always be more than fair to me. I'm not stupid enough to think I've a job at Old Trafford for life – I realise the day will come when the club and I will have to part company. But I'll still be proud to say I played for Manchester United, where 'the boss' preaches football first, last and always. But we must play to win.

Only the best is good enough for Mr Busby – and when my playing days are over, I should like to think that I was good enough to be considered among the best. I feel that I can't have been such a rascal, after all, to past the test.

I have been wrong many times, and have been blamed for letting people down now and then. If that is so, then I've hurt myself more than the people I've let down. Because above all, I've let down football, the game I love. Yet I hope I have never done anything to smear the game.

When I was much younger and, therefore, extremely impressionable, I tried to act as I thought the older players would expect me to act. Some habits I formed were good, some not so good. Some I've left behind (the worst, I hope) and some still remain. As each year passes, I realise that older players have a responsibility to the youngsters – that the stars should try to set a good example.

So to any boy who may pick up this book I would say: don't dwell too long on the mistakes I have made. I was asked to tell my story, and all the incidents I have related were part of that story. I don't set them up as examples to follow. Quick-tempered I may have been . . . but I'm not so old yet that I can't improve. Maybe I'll mellow in the next few years, so that at the end of my career, I'll be able to give some good examples, too.